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OF THE PRIMITIVE  
CHURCH

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# THE HISTORIC MARTYRS OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH

BY

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AND CANON OF CANTERBURY

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MY FIRST BOOK,  
ON THE PERSECUTION OF DIOCLETIAN, WAS DEDICATED  
TO MY FATHER.

I DEDICATE THIS SEQUEL,  
AFTER AN INTERVAL OF NEARLY THIRTY YEARS,  
TO MY MOTHER,

BY BIRTH A MITFORD OF MITFORD,  
WHO AT THE AGE OF EIGHTY-FOUR YEARS STILL SHOWS  
AN ALERTNESS OF INTELLECT WHICH HER CHILDREN  
MAY WELL ENVY, AND WHOSE FAITH AND  
CHARACTER WILL REMAIN AN  
INSPIRATION TO THEM AS  
LONG AS THEY LIVE.



## P R E F A C E

THIS book is not written for the learned world, but to introduce to the ordinary reader some of the most trustworthy of the records of the primitive martyrs and confessors. In accordance with this object, I have not judged it necessary or expedient to discuss questions which are of much interest to the historian, but which might be repellent to others, concerning the age and authenticity of some of the documents used, or with regard to the trustworthiness of the several narratives. It will, I hope, be enough to say, that no narrative has been inserted in this book which may not be considered historically true, though in some cases the portions here given have been disentangled from a good deal which is fictitious. This is particularly the case with the Roman martyrdoms, such as those of Caecilia and Sebastian; but it holds good also with regard to some of the Eastern martyrdoms, like that of Theodore the Tiro. It would probably be possible, by a similar process of sorting and sifting, to extract something like history out of a good many other Acts and Passions. Le Blant, amongst others, has shown how often material of real value is embedded in the midst of worthless and tiresome legend. But I do not think that the book as a whole would gain by the insertion of a large number of doubtful reconstructions. Such narratives as those of Polycarp and the martyrs of Lyons, of Perpetua, Cyprian, Montanus, and Marian, of the martyrs of

Palestine under Diocletian, and of the forty-nine martyrs of Abitina, would be less effective for the purpose which this book has in view, if they were lost in a mass of others standing in constant need of apology. If I have omitted some narratives which have met with acceptance from many critics—for instance, the Acts of Afra—it has been because I could not bring myself to consider them historical.

The footnotes are only intended, as a rule, to tell the reader where he may find the original documents from which the narratives have been taken. The great storehouse is, of course, the *Acta Sanctorum*, supplemented here and there by the *Analecta Bollandiana*; and, for the last part of the year, which the Bollandists have not yet reached, by Surius' *Vitae Sanctorum*. The most useful collection of Acts of Martyrs is Ruinart's *Acta primorum Martyrum*. It has passed through several editions; the one which I use is the Verona edition of 1731. The chief fault of Ruinart is that, as a rule, he only gives his documents in Latin, even where the original was certainly Greek, and when it was easily accessible. Modern collections in a convenient form, and to be had cheaply, are those of H. Hurter (vol. xiii. of his *Patrum Opuscula Selecta*—all in Latin, Innsbruck, 1870), of R. Knopf (*Ausgewählte Märtyreracten*, in Krüger's *Sammlung ausgew. Quellenschriften*, Tübingen and Leipzig, 1901), and of O. von Gebhardt (*Ausgewählte Märtyreracten*, Berlin, 1902). Hurter's is the least valuable of the three; it makes no attempt to represent the advance of criticism with regard to the documents which it includes. Among collections of documents translated into modern languages may be named H. Leclercq's *Les Martyrs* (2 vols., Paris, 1903), F. C. Conybeare's *Monuments of Early Christianity* (translated from the



Armenian, London, 1894), and H. Hyvernât's *Actes des Martyrs de l'Égypte* (in Coptic, with French translation, Paris and Rome, 1886-7). No Englishman can forget the *Acts and Monuments* of Foxe, the first volume of which contains translations of such of the best documents as Foxe had access to : it is a pity that he did not know some of the finest, like the Passion of Perpetua.

Works which deal critically with the Acts of the Martyrs are many in number. I will here name a few only. Tillemont's great *Mémoires pour servir* still remains the indispensable guide of all who work in this field of history. B. Aubé, in his *Histoire des Persécutions* (3 vols., 1875-85), comes down to the end of the third century ; P. Allard's *Histoire des Persécutions* (5 vols., 1885-1900) comes down to the peace of the Church under Constantine. The student will find help in E. Preuschen's contribution on the Acts of the Martyrs to Harnack's *Geschichte der altchristlichen Litteratur* (Leipzig, 1893-97), and in O. Bardenhewer's *Geschichte der Altkirchlichen Litteratur*, vol. ii. pp. 611 foll. (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1903), and for the period before Decius in K. J. Neumann's *Römische Staat und die allgemeine Kirche* (Leipzig, 1890).

There is one dear and honoured friend, whose name I must take leave to mention here with deep gratitude for help received in connexion with these pages. Monsieur Alexis Larpent, who will ever be associated in my mind with the revered memory of Archbishop Benson and with his *Cyprian*, has been kind enough, amidst many physical infirmities and the duties of a busy life, to place his great erudition and his vigilant accuracy at my service, and has given me invaluable criticisms and suggestions extending through the first fifteen chapters of the book.

In sending this book to the press, it is my hope and prayer that it may not only instruct and interest, but that it may serve to stimulate its readers to a more ardent devotion to the great cause for which the martyrs suffered. They suffered for liberty of conscience, and the service which they thus did for mankind can never be exaggerated. But it was not for liberty of conscience as an abstract principle. They died for their loyalty to One Holy God amidst the immoralities of a corrupt polytheism. They died because they would not even pretend to put anything else on the same level with the Son of God who was crucified for them. They died because they would not abandon the Gospels which tell of His incarnate life, nor absent themselves from the Eucharist which He instituted to be the bond between Himself and us, and between us amongst ourselves. This faith requires to be held to-day with a force of conviction like theirs ; and perhaps there is no better way to brace and strengthen our Christian principles than by dwelling often upon the triumphs which the same faith has won in the past.

CAMBRIDGE, *St. Matthias' Day*, 1905.

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Quorum intuentes exitum conversationis  
imitamini fidem.

HEB. xiii. 7.



# THE HISTORIC MARTYRS OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH

## CHAPTER I

### THE MARTYRS OF THE APOSTOLIC AGE

OUR Lord warned His disciples that they would be made to suffer for His sake, as He Himself suffered. He told them that they would be delivered into prisons and brought before kings and rulers, that some of them would be scourged in the synagogues and persecuted from city to city, some of them killed and crucified. He said that they would be hated of all men ; that they would be betrayed by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolk, and friends ; that people would think to serve God by putting them to death. He exhorted them not to fear those who killed the body, and, after that, had no more that they could do. He promised that, when they were brought to trial, He would give them a mouth and wisdom which all their adversaries would be unable to gainsay or resist. He promised that the Holy Ghost Himself should speak by their lips. He said that whosoever confessed Him before men, He in turn would confess them before God and before the angels.

The New Testament tells us something of the sufferings by which these predictions of our Saviour

began to be fulfilled in the lives of His earliest followers. It tells us of the dauntless courage of the first martyr, St. Stephen—

“As through the rushing shower of stones  
He saw the open'd heaven.”

It contains St. Paul's terrible list of the sufferings which he had gone through for the sake of the Gospel—sufferings which were far from ended when he wrote: “Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of rivers, in perils of robbers, in perils from my countrymen, in perils from the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in labour and travail, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.” The New Testament tells us of the beating of the apostles by authority of the Jewish rulers, and of the imprisonment of St. Peter, and of the death of St. James the brother of St. John by the sword of Herod.

It may be one of the joys of the world to come to be allowed to learn more in detail about the history of those great saints than we at present know, and especially about the sufferings by which their devotion to Christ was tested. Fictitious stories about them were made up at a later date, to supply the lack of better information. But a few precious anecdotes have been preserved by good authorities, which deserve to be known by all Christian people. We must here gather up some of those fragments with the same reverence with which the early Christians gathered up

the relics of their brethren who were torn for Christ's sake by wild beasts or burned in the fire.

A very ancient writer records, on the authority of still earlier tradition, a touching incident in the martyrdom of St. James the son of Zebedee: how the man who had given information against him, and so had brought him to his death, as soon as he heard the apostle's brave confession of Christ, was deeply moved, and acknowledged himself also to be a Christian. The two men were led away together to execution; and, as they went, the accuser turned to St. James and asked his forgiveness. The apostle did not immediately answer. It seems as if the Son of Thunder had schooled himself no longer to speak on the impulse of the moment, either in rebuke or in the ardour of love. He "considered for a little while," we are told, "and then said, 'Peace be to thee,' and kissed him." And so the two were beheaded together.<sup>1</sup>

The Jewish Christians of Jerusalem preserved among them an account of the martyrdom of St. James's namesake—"the Lord's brother," as he is called by St. Paul. It is as follows:—

St. James was a very strict observer of the Jewish law. He had been a Nazarite from childhood, drinking no wine or strong drink, and eating no animal food. No razor ever touched his head; he did not anoint himself with oil, nor use the luxury of the bath. He was always clothed in linen, and never wore wool. So frequent was he in prayer and intercession for his people, that by constant kneeling his knees had become dried up like the knees of a camel. He was known among the Jews as "James the Just"; and they called him by a title, "Oblias," which seems to have meant

<sup>1</sup> Clement of Alexandria in Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* ii. 9.

“the bulwark of the people.” It is even said, though it is difficult to believe, that because of his sanctity he was permitted to share the privilege of the priests and to go into the Holy Place in the temple.

After the death of Festus, the governor of Judæa, who is mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, and before the arrival of his successor, James and some other Christians were arraigned before the Jewish Sanhedrin, and condemned to be stoned. The crime was, it seems, averted for a while by the action of some of the most respected of the Jews, who secretly appealed to Herod Agrippa and to the incoming Roman governor to stop the action of the high priest. But at a later time an opportunity was found. At the season of the Pass-over, the scribes and Pharisees carried James up to the “pinnacle of the temple,” and begged him to use his influence with the assembled people not to believe in our Lord. The saying of Jesus about the “door” was in their minds, and they asked James to explain to the multitude “what the door of Jesus is.” “Why do you ask me about the Son of Man?” was the saint’s reply—using in his last moments, like Stephen, that title which elsewhere is only used by our Lord Himself in speaking of Himself—“He is sitting in heaven at the right hand of mighty power, and will come on the clouds of heaven.” At this testimony, the believers among the crowd raised the shout of “Hosanna to the Son of David”; but the Pharisees and scribes seized James, and flung him down from the “pinnacle,” and stoned him where he lay. James had still sufficient strength to kneel for the last time, and prayed, like his divine “Brother” before him, “I beseech Thee, O Lord God our Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” While they were stoning

him, one of the descendants of Jonadab the son of Rechab, mentioned by the prophet Jeremiah, who, according to this account, were now reckoned as priests, cried aloud to them, "Stay; what do ye? the Just one is praying for you." Then a fuller who was present seized the bat or club which he used in the work of his trade, and brought it down upon the head of the Just one. So he died. It was believed by many that the siege of Jerusalem by Vespasian, which began soon after, was a judgment upon the Jews for this murder.<sup>1</sup>

There are one or two other notices of members of the family of our Lord.

In the time of Domitian, the son of Vespasian, the descendants of Judas the brother of St. James were brought into danger. Domitian was extremely suspicious and jealous of any possible rivals to his sovereignty; and as the ancient story goes, some members of a heretical sect denounced the grandsons of Judas to him, as being of the royal house of David, and kinsmen of Christ. They were brought before the emperor. He asked them if they were descended from David, and they said they were. He asked them what property they had. They told him that they had between them nine thousand *denarii*, which means about £320. They said that it was not in money, but that it represented the value of thirty-nine acres of land, which they cultivated themselves and lived upon the proceeds. Domitian looked at their hands, and saw that they were horny with the labour of the field. He then went on to ask them about Christ and His kingdom, its nature, its situation, and the time of its appearance. They replied that it was no earthly kingdom, but a heavenly and

<sup>1</sup> The story is found in Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* ii. 23.



angelic one, which was to take form at the end of the world, when Christ would come in glory to judge the quick and the dead, and to give to every man according to his deserts. Even the jealousy of Domitian could find no cause of alarm in these obscure and lowly men. Although as a rule he was very severe with Christians, he dismissed the two men to their homes, where the churches received them with great honour, and they lived until the times of Trajan.<sup>1</sup>

In those same times of Trajan died, by a martyr's death, an aged relative of theirs, named Symeon. He was the son of Clopas, who is generally supposed to be the same as Alphæus; and the ancient author who relates the story describes Clopas as being the uncle of our Lord. Symeon therefore would be His first cousin. On the death of St. James, Symeon was appointed bishop of the church of Jerusalem in his stead. Against him, as against his kinsmen, certain heretics laid information before the Roman authorities that he was a Christian and a member of a family which claimed to be royal. It so happened that the informers themselves were afterwards apprehended for the same reason, because of their supposed connexion with the house of David. Symeon had by that time attained the patriarchal age of a hundred and twenty years; but for many days he was subjected to indignities and rough usage. He showed a power of endurance under it which astonished the Roman magistrate and all beholders, and was finally condemned to the death by which his blessed Kinsman had died, by crucifixion.<sup>2</sup>

These martyrdoms took place at Jerusalem. At Rome, meanwhile, many had been called to suffer for their faith. The first persecution of any large and

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* iii. 20.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* iii. 32.

public proportions broke out under Nero. Up to that time the Roman government had supposed that the Christians were only a sect of the Jews; and as the Jewish religion was allowed by the State, the Christians had profited by its protection. It was in the time of Nero that this condition of things came to an end, and the Christians stood out in the eyes of the Roman authorities as a separate and dangerous body of men. The heathen historian, Tacitus, relates that when the city of Rome was destroyed by fire (in the year 64), the report was everywhere circulated and believed that the emperor himself had caused the conflagration, or had at least hindered it from being extinguished. "To stifle the report," he says, "Nero provided others to bear the accusation, in the shape of people who were vulgarly called 'Christians,' in detestation of their abominable character. These he visited with every refinement of punishment. First some were arrested who confessed" that they were Christians; "then, on information given by them, an immense number were convicted, not so much on the charge of incendiarism as on that of ill-will towards mankind at large. Their deaths were turned into a form of amusement. They were wrapped in the skins of wild beasts to be torn in pieces by dogs, or were fastened to crosses to be set on fire, and, when the daylight came to an end, were burned for an illumination at night. Nero threw open his own gardens for the spectacle, and made it the occasion of a circus exhibition, mingling with the populace in the costume of a driver, or standing in his chariot. Sympathy was at length felt for the sufferers, although the objects of it were guilty persons who deserved the extremest punishment: people felt that they were being destroyed not for the benefit of

the public but to serve the cruel purpose of one man.”<sup>1</sup>

Such is the account given by a heathen writer. A Christian who had lived through those terrible days wrote some years later to the Corinthian church, and spoke of the sufferings through which the Christians at Rome had passed. This was the great St. Clement, the third Bishop of Rome. Warning the Corinthian church against the factious spirit which still prevailed in it, he gave instances of the mischief which it had caused in the ancient world. He traced the persecution of the Christians to the same cause. “Let us come,” he says, “to the champions nearest to our own time, and take the noble example set in our own generation. Through jealousy and envy the greatest and most righteous pillars were persecuted, and were called upon to contend even unto death. Let us set before our eyes the good apostles—Peter, who through unrighteous jealousy endured, not one or two, but many troubles, and so went by a martyr’s death to the place of glory which was his due. Through jealousy and strife Paul showed us what is the reward of patient endurance. Seven times he was imprisoned; he was driven into exile; he was stoned; he preached both in the east and in the west, and gained a noble renown for his faith, having taught the whole world righteousness and having come to the very bounds of the west; and when he had borne his witness before the rulers, he was set free from the world and passed into the holy place, the greatest pattern of endurance. To these men of holy life was gathered a great multitude of elect souls, who were made the victims of jealousy, and under many indignities and torments showed the noblest

<sup>1</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, xv. 44.



example among ourselves." Like Tacitus, St. Clement bears witness to the way in which the martyrdoms of Christians, even of Christian women, were turned into an amusement. They were dressed up to represent various characters in heathen mythology who had died horrible deaths or were condemned to dreadful sufferings in the world below. Some, like Dirce in the Greek mythology, were tied between wild bulls and torn in pieces ; others, like the daughters of Danaus, were worn out with the fatigue of being made to fetch and carry water, without a moment's rest, night or day, to fill great vessels of which the bottom had been pierced. "And so," says St. Clement, "weak as they were in body, they succeeded in running the sure race of faith and received a noble reward." <sup>1</sup>

All ancient tradition is agreed that the two great apostles whom St. Clement mentions perished at Rome during the reign of Nero. St. Peter, before his own death, had the pain of witnessing what must have been worse than death to him. We know, from what St. Paul tells us, that St. Peter's wife accompanied him on his missionary travels ; and it is probable that she was still with him when he went to Rome, and there preceded him to martyrdom. She may even have been one of those women of whom St. Clement speaks as undergoing so fantastic a death for the amusement of the Roman populace. A very ancient story relates that St. Peter saw her led away to death, and that as he watched her going he was glad at heart "because she had been called and was going home." "He lifted up his voice," so the story runs, "and addressed her in a very encouraging and comforting manner, speaking to her by name"—the name had been for-

<sup>1</sup> Clement of Rome, 5, 6.

gotten ; some late legends give it as Concordia—"and saying, 'Remember the Lord, Concordia,' " or whatever her name was. "Such," says the old narrator, "was the marriage of the saints, and their disposition at the last to those whom they loved so dearly."<sup>1</sup>

Outside the gate of Rome, upon the Appian Way, stands a little chapel known by the name of *Domine, quo vadis*—"Lord, whither goest Thou?" It is said—and though the story is told only by a late writer, the great Bishop Lightfoot was inclined to believe that it was true—that the Christians at Rome came to St. Peter at the outbreak of the persecution and besought him to fly from the city. St. Peter yielded to their importunity. When he reached the spot where the chapel stands, Jesus Christ met him in the darkness of the night. The apostle once more asked Him, as he had done before, "Lord, whither goest Thou?" The Lord answered him, "I go to Rome, to be crucified again." St. Peter understood the meaning of the rebuke. He returned and told the brethren what he had seen, and soon after glorified God by his death, as the Lord had foretold that he should, when He said, "Another shall gird thee and carry thee whither thou wouldest not."<sup>2</sup>

The ancient tradition of the Church is that St. Peter was crucified, and, at his own desire, crucified head downwards. It was quite in keeping with Nero's conduct in the Roman persecution to crucify him in that grotesque position, and St. Peter, in his humility, might very likely welcome the indignity, so that the form of his death might not look too like that of his Master.<sup>3</sup> The place of his martyrdom was by the

<sup>1</sup> Clement of Alexandria in Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* iii. 30.

<sup>2</sup> Ambrose, *Epist.* 21.

<sup>3</sup> Origen in Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* iii. 1.

Vatican road, on the other side of the Tiber from the city of Rome, where the great church of St. Peter now stands. St. Paul, who was a Roman citizen, received the more honourable death of beheading, near the Ostian Way.

The policy which was begun by Nero was continued under later emperors. It was taken for granted that all Christians were enemies to society. The First Epistle of St. Peter, which in all probability was written at Rome itself, shows what was the popular opinion about Christians. Again and again the apostle mentions the way in which they were "spoken against as evildoers," and in which "their good conversation in Christ was falsely accused." "Let none of you," he says, "suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or an evildoer"—which were the kind of things which the heathen expected of them—"or," he adds, "as a busybody in other men's matters ; but if any suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this name." If at first the emperor and his magistrates persuaded themselves that crimes were proved against the Christians, and put them to death for these crimes, they soon came to put them to death just because they were Christians, without asking any further questions. If a man acknowledged that he was a Christian, and refused to give it up, they no longer endeavoured to find out what particular evil deeds he was guilty of ; that he was a Christian was enough. No positive law was passed making Christianity illegal—that was not necessary ; but they were suppressed as a danger to mankind at large.

It was only to be expected that the Church should suffer more than usual under so cruel and suspicious an emperor as Domitian. He even put to death as a Christian his cousin Flavius Clemens, who was consul

at the time ; while Flavius' wife, Domitilla, was banished for life to a little island in the Mediterranean. A yet loftier personage than the Roman consul felt the hand of Domitian. The aged St. John had for many years been living at Ephesus, keeping watch over the churches of Asia, and teaching his "little children" to love one another. Many beautiful anecdotes are told of his life and labours there—at one time going into the dangerous mountains to reconvert a young brigand who had fallen away from the faith ; at another fleeing out of the public baths because a heretical teacher happened to come in ; sometimes solacing himself in hours of recreation by playing with a tame partridge, because, as he said, the bow could not always be kept strung. Men who had been his disciples there spoke afterwards of their recollection of him as of some great high priest, who wore upon his head the sacred mitre, with its inscription of "holiness to the Lord." From these peaceful and fruitful ministrations he was carried away to Rome under Domitian, according to an ancient account, to answer for his faith. There he was cast into a vat of boiling oil, near the Latin Gate of the city. It was a kind of punishment which the philosopher Seneca speaks of as suitable for a slave convicted of heinous crime. Though St. John was wonderfully preserved from death, he, like Domitilla, was banished to an island, which was probably the island of Patmos, where the great Revelation was vouchsafed to him.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tertullian, *De Praescr. Haer.* 36.

## CHAPTER II

### IGNATIUS AND POLYCARP

PERSECUTION, as has been already mentioned, broke upon the Church in the time of a very different emperor from Nero or Domitian—the upright and generous Trajan. A letter of extraordinary interest is still preserved in which the younger Pliny, who was at the time governor of Bithynia, asks Trajan for instructions how to deal with cases of Christianity that are brought before him.

“I have never taken part,” he says, “in the trial of a Christian, and therefore I do not know what it is that they are commonly punished for, and with what degree of allowance, nor what direction the investigation should take. I have been much perplexed to know whether any distinction should be made between one age and another, or whether the weak and tender should be treated in exactly the same way as the strong; whether those who repent should be pardoned, or whether if a person has once been a Christian he should gain nothing by ceasing to be so; whether the very name of Christianity is liable to punishment, apart from disgraceful conduct, or the disgraceful conduct which is attached to the name.” This is evidently Pliny’s way of suggesting that perhaps, after all, there might be nothing to punish in Christianity itself, and that no harm would be done by allowing it to be practised.

“Meanwhile,” he continues, “this is the method



which I have followed with those who were brought before me as Christians. I have asked them directly whether they were Christians. If they confessed, I have asked them a second and a third time, with threats of punishment ; if they persisted I have ordered them to be taken to execution. I had no doubt that whatever the thing which they confessed amounted to, their obstinacy at any rate, and their inflexible stubbornness, deserved to be punished." Whether Christianity were or were not in itself a pernicious thing, to refuse to do as the governor bade them was an act of insubordination which could not be tolerated for an instant.

"Others there were," Pliny says, "as mad as these, who possessed the right of Roman citizenship, and for that reason I have marked them to be sent for trial to the capital. By-and-by, as often happens, the charge of Christianity grew more frequent as a direct consequence of these proceedings, and several different kinds of cases came up. An anonymous paper was laid before me containing many names. In the case of those who said that they were not Christians and never had been, when they had repeated after me a form of address to the gods, and had offered incense and wine to your image, which I had ordered to be brought into court for the purpose, along with the statues of the deities, and when, in addition to this, they had cursed Christ—none of which things it is said that real Christians can be induced to do—I thought that I might let them go. Others who were named by the informer said first that they were Christians and then that they were not. They said that they had been so, but had left it off—some three years ago, some a good many years, one or two as many as twenty. All these, like-

wise, both worshipped your effigy and the statues of the gods, and cursed Christ."

Now follows a passage of the deepest interest. Every word of it deserves to be carefully studied. It is the earliest description of Christian ways given by one who was not himself a Christian, but earnestly and sincerely desirous of doing what was right in the discharge of his duties. "Yet they affirmed," says Pliny, "that their fault or their error came to no more than this—that it was their custom to assemble on a fixed day before daylight, and to repeat alternately amongst themselves a song to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by an oath—not to any crime," as conspirators against social order would have done, "but that they would not commit theft or robbery or adultery, that they would not break their word, and that when called upon to produce a thing entrusted to them they would not repudiate the trust. When this was done, they said that it had been their habit to depart and then come together again later to take a meal, but an ordinary harmless meal, and this they had ceased to do after the issue of my edict forbidding the existence of organised associations, as you commanded."

The first of these two gatherings, which took place before daylight, was, without doubt, the gathering for the weekly Eucharist. Even the apostate Christians of whom Pliny is speaking did not tell him of the central action of those early assemblies. It was too sacred to be mentioned to a heathen. They only told him of the worship which accompanied their Communion, and of the moral discipline which preserved it from profanation. Christ was their God, and no one was allowed to receive Him without pledging himself to a holy life.

The later gathering in the day was the "love-feast," or *Agapé*. No commandment of the Lord had instituted the love-feasts, and the Christians felt no difficulty about giving them up; but it was otherwise with the Holy Communion. To give that up would have been to abandon Christianity itself.

When Pliny first heard of the meal which the Christians shared in common, he doubtless thought that it was possible that he might find that it was a meal of some horrible character, such as popular calumny attributed to the Christians. They were supposed to be cannibals, and to drink the blood of children. This was what heathen ill-wishers made out, from such reports as came through to them about the sacred food of the Lord's Table. Pliny was much struck when he learned how harmless was the social meal of which he was informed, and how readily it had been dropped. "This," he says, "made me think it the more necessary to find out from two female slaves, who were called *ministrae* (or deaconesses), how far the account was true. I did so by torture," without which the evidence of slaves was not accepted in Roman law. "I discovered nothing," he concludes, "beyond a degraded and extravagant superstition. So I adjourned the hearing and had recourse to you. The matter seemed to me worth troubling you about, particularly because of the number of those imperilled. Many of every age and every rank, and of both sexes too, are and will be in danger. It is not only the cities, but even the villages and the country, that are penetrated by this catching superstition. Yet it looks as if it might be stopped and corrected. At any rate, it is quite proved that the temples, which were almost deserted, have begun to be filled, and that sacred rites long disused are again resorted to,



and that on every side there is a sale for animals for sacrifice,"—or, perhaps, "a sale for fodder for sacrificial animals,"—"whereas up to the present it has been a rare thing to find a purchaser. From this it is easy to imagine what a multitude of people may be put in the right way, if only a place of repentance is allowed."

Trajan had no wish to push matters to an extreme. It probably never entered his head to permit the exercise of Christianity—at any rate he took no steps to permit it ;—but he did not wish to go out of his way to repress our religion. He wrote back to Pliny, approving of his course of action. He said that it was impossible to lay down any hard and fast rule for dealing with such cases. He said that Christians were not to be sought out as ordinary criminals were sought out, though, if accused and convicted, they were to be punished. If any gave such satisfactory proofs of renouncing Christianity as Pliny had mentioned in his letter, he was to receive a free pardon, however strong a suspicion might lie against him because of the past. Trajan strongly condemned the receiving of anonymous informations, which he said offered "a pernicious precedent, and was unworthy of the age."<sup>1</sup>

The most illustrious victim of the persecution under Trajan was the great Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch in Syria. Of his earlier life little is known to us ; but seven Epistles of Ignatius remain, which show us abundantly the character of the man. Ignatius was no reserved Roman or philosophical Greek. He had all the passionate fervour of an Oriental, and he was endowed besides with the Christian spirit of prophecy. These Epistles were all written while Ignatius was on

<sup>1</sup> Pliny, *Epist.* x. 96, 97.

his way from Antioch to be put to death at Rome. He passed from city to city, as he himself says, "tied and bound, by land and sea, by night and by day, in the midst of ten leopards." This is his description of the soldiers who guarded him, and of whom he says that they only grew worse for being kindly treated. He had been condemned to fight with the wild beasts at Rome, and he says that his fight with the wild beasts was already begun. Yet, wherever he passed, Christians of the various churches appear to have been allowed free access to him, and he preached and prophesied among them, exhorting them above all things to have peace amongst themselves and to obey their bishops as they would obey Christ Himself. Nothing was to be done without the bishop. No Eucharist was valid, no baptism or love-feast lawful, unless the bishop was present or had authorised another to take his place. He who did anything without the bishop's knowledge, Ignatius told them, did service to the devil. The churches of Asia were infested at this time with a heretical belief known to us as Docetism, which made the human nature of our Lord to be only a phantom and a semblance. This belief was especially hateful to Ignatius. He insisted that "our Lord was truly of the seed of David according to the flesh, the Son of God according to the will and power of God, truly born of a Virgin, baptized by John that all righteousness might be fulfilled by Him, and truly nailed for our sake in flesh under Pontius Pilate and Herod the tetrarch." He said that those who held the "semblance" views were themselves a mere semblance; they were wild beasts in human form. He felt, and they themselves felt also, that if the flesh of Christ was an unreal thing, the Eucharist had no meaning. "They keep away,"

he cried, "from the Eucharist and prayer, because they allow not that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins, and which the Father of His goodness raised up." Nothing filled Ignatius with greater horror than such a thought. For himself, he was—to use his own expression—enamoured of Jesus Christ. "My love," he wrote, "is crucified. . . . I have no delight in the food of corruption, nor in the pleasures of this life. I desire the bread of God, which is the flesh of Christ, . . . and for drink I desire His blood, which is incorruptible charity."

The passage of Ignatius was everywhere received with wondering awe, like the passage of a being from another world. He himself was in a state of unearthly exaltation. The thought of what he was about to endure filled him with a half frenzied joy; the one fear which he had was lest some powerful Christians at Rome should procure his pardon from the government and so cheat him of the coveted end. "I dread your very love," he writes to them, "lest it should do me a wrong. I bid all men know that of my own free will I die for God, unless ye should hinder me. Let me be given to the wild beasts, for through them I can attain to God. I am God's wheat, and I am ground by the teeth of wild beasts that I may be found pure bread. Rather entice the wild beasts, that they may be my sepulchre and may leave no part of my body to be burdensome to any one when I am fallen asleep." "Oh that I may enjoy the wild beasts that are prepared for me. I pray that they may make short work of me. I will entice them to make short work of devouring me, and not to do as they have done with some, whom they were afraid to touch. If they will not do it of their own accord, I will make

them do it. Come fire and cross and grapplings with wild beasts, wrenchings of bones, hackings of limbs, crushings of my whole body, cruel tortures of the devil, only let me attain to Jesus Christ." "Him I seek who died for us, Him I desire who rose again on our behalf. The pangs of travail are upon me. Forgive me, brethren. Do not hinder me from living, do not desire to slay me. Suffer me to receive the pure light ; when I get there I shall be a man."<sup>1</sup>

The stories which are current with regard to the trial and death of Ignatius are late fictions, and have no historical value ; but there is no doubt that he attained his desire, and was torn in pieces in the Colosseum on some "Roman holiday." Nothing that had yet happened in the Church did so much to enhance the glory of martyrdom as the intoxication of spirit with which this fiery Syrian prophet shot like a meteor from the East to the West to die.

Among the seven letters of Ignatius is one written to the bishop of the church of Smyrna, through which city Ignatius had passed. The bishop was then a man of about forty years of age, and Ignatius speaks with rapture of the joy which it had given him "to see his blameless face" and to commune with one who was "grounded as upon an immovable rock." The bishop's name was Polycarp. Polycarp in his youth had been a hearer of the apostle John, and it is probable that St. John himself had appointed him to the bishopric of Smyrna. He may even have been the "angel" of that church at the time when the Apocalypse of St. John was addressed to it. To him Ignatius wrote : "The times require thee, as pilots require winds, and as one tossed at sea requires a haven. Be vigilant as an athlete of

<sup>1</sup> Ignatius, *Rom.* 6.

God. Stand firm like an anvil under the blows of the hammer. It is the part of a great athlete to receive blows and to conquer. Be yet more diligent than thou art ; learn to know the times."

As Bishop Lightfoot says, "the words were in some sense prophetic." For forty or fifty years more Polycarp remained at his post, firm and immovable, teaching to a later generation what he had received from the apostles, and resisting every incursion of strange doctrine. One who had known him in youth, reproaching a fellow-student of his for having deserted the faith of Polycarp, says to him: "If that blessed and apostolic elder had heard anything of this kind, he would have cried out and stopped his ears, and would have said, as his manner was, 'Oh, good God, for what times hast Thou kept me that I should endure these things?' and would have fled from the place." A few years before his death he visited Rome, to confer with the bishop, Anicetus, about the time for observing Easter, upon which the Eastern and Western churches disagreed ; and so great was the reverence felt for him that, although the Roman church would not accept Polycarp's views, Anicetus asked him to take his own place in conducting the service of the holy Eucharist, as though Polycarp and not he were the bishop of the church of Rome. While there, a heretic named Marcion, whom Polycarp had known in Asia, met him, and sought his recognition. "Recognise thee!" cried Polycarp; "I recognise the first-born of Satan."

The time came when Polycarp was to imitate the endurance of Ignatius, and to suffer martyrdom like him. In the year 155, while Antoninus Pius was emperor, the ever-smouldering fire of persecution broke out at Smyrna. A number of Christians were tortured



or thrown to the wild beasts. "They were so rent with scourges," say some who witnessed the scene, "that their veins and arteries and muscular structure were laid bare to sight, so that the bystanders were sorry for them and lamented them. But they, like valiant men, neither moaned nor groaned, showing us all that in that hour of torture Christ's martyrs were absent from the flesh, or rather that the Lord was standing by them and communing with them." Not all indeed exhibited such firmness. One, a Phrygian named Quintus, who had thrust himself forward, unsought, as a candidate for martyrdom, was seized with panic when he saw the wild beasts. The proconsul, whose name was L. Statius Quadratus, by use of much entreaty persuaded him to swear the oath of recantation, and to offer incense. His wise fellow Christians disapproved of such volunteering for martyrdom. In contrast with the cowardice of Quintus, one Christian, named Germanicus, particularly distinguished himself in the combat with the wild beasts. The proconsul was anxious to save him. He urged him to "have pity on his youth," and to abandon his profession, but Germanicus refused. He dragged the wild beast to himself by main force, and compelled it to kill him. The sight of such constancy, while it encouraged the Christians, provoked the anger of the heathen, and they cried out, "Away with the atheists! search for Polycarp."

When the tidings were brought to Polycarp, it was his desire at first to remain in Smyrna, but the brethren persuaded him to withdraw. He retired to a country house not far from the city, and spent his time with a few companions, "praying night and day for all, and for the churches throughout the world, which was his constant habit." Three days before his apprehension,

while he was praying, he fell into a vision. He saw his pillow on fire. He turned and said to those who were with him, "I must be burned alive."

The search for Polycarp continued, and he took his departure to another country place. The search-party came into the neighbourhood, but not being able to find him they laid hold on two young slaves belonging to Polycarp's household and put them to the torture. One of them gave way, and undertook to guide them to his master. Taking the boy with them, the police and horsemen, armed with their usual weapons, "as against a robber," started about supper-time, on "the day of the Preparation." The captain of the band bore the name of Herod. The writers of the account eagerly note every detail which recalled to them the circumstances of the capture of our Lord. Late in the evening the men arrived at the spot, and found Polycarp at rest in the upper room of a small building. There would have been time for Polycarp to make his escape, but he refused, saying, "The will of God be done." Hearing that they were come, he went downstairs and entered into conversation with them. Those who were present could not help wondering at his great age and his firmness of mind. It seemed to them strange to take so much trouble for the apprehension of an old man like that. Late as the hour was, Polycarp gave orders that a table should be laid for his captors to eat and drink as much as they pleased, and asked them in return to allow him a space of time that he might pray undisturbed. Upon their granting his request he stood up and prayed aloud, and "so full was he of the grace of God that for two hours he could not hold his peace, and those who heard him were astonished, and many repented of having come against such a reverend old man.

“When at length his prayer came to an end, after remembering all whom he had at any time met, whether small or great, distinguished or otherwise, and all the Catholic Church throughout the world, the hour for departure having now come, they set him on an ass and brought him into the city. It was a great sabbath day. Polycarp was met by Herod, the head of the police, with his father, Nicetes, who took him into their carriage and seated themselves beside him, and plied him with persuasions. ‘What harm is it,’ they said, ‘to save yourself by saying, Cæsar is Lord, and offering some incense?’ At first he did not answer them ; but when they continued he said, ‘I shall not do what you advise me.’ So when they failed to persuade him, they used harsh language to him, and pulled him down from the carriage with such haste that in dismounting he tore the skin off his shin. Polycarp, without turning round, as if he felt it not, hastened with alacrity upon his way. They took him to the stadium,” or race-course, “where there was so great a hubbub that no man’s voice could be heard. As Polycarp entered into the stadium, a voice came from heaven, ‘Be strong, Polycarp, and of a good courage.’” It was as if the exhortations which Ignatius had made on his way to martyrdom were renewed by one greater than Ignatius. The speaker was unseen, but the voice was heard by Christians who were present.

“It got about that Polycarp had been brought as a prisoner, and the noise in the stadium increased. He was set before the proconsul. The proconsul asked whether his name was Polycarp, and when he acknowledged that it was, he endeavoured to persuade him to deny his faith. He said, ‘Pay respect to your old age,’ and everything of that kind that they are wont to say ; ‘Swear by the fortune of Cæsar,’ ‘Change your



mind, and say, Away with the atheists.' But Polycarp, looking with a countenance full of meaning upon all that multitude of ungodly heathen with which the stadium was filled, waved his hand over them, and looked up to heaven with a sigh and said, 'Away with the atheists.' The proconsul pressed him hard and said, 'Take the oath and I release you ; revile Christ.' But Polycarp answered, 'I have now been His servant fourscore and six years, and He never did me wrong ; how can I blaspheme my King who saved me ?' The magistrate pressed him again and said, 'Swear by the fortune of Cæsar.' He answered, 'If you think vainly that I shall swear by the fortune of Cæsar as you say, and if you pretend not to know what I am, I tell you plainly, I am a Christian. If you desire to learn what Christianity is, name a day and hear me.' The proconsul said, 'Prevail upon the people ;' but Polycarp answered, 'As for you, I should have deemed you worthy of speech, for we have been taught to render to the powers and authorities which are appointed by God such due honour as does no harm ; but these I do not consider worthy that I should make my defence to them.' The proconsul said, 'I have wild beasts here ; I shall throw you to them unless you change your mind.' He answered, 'Call for them ; for the change of mind from better to worse is a change we may not make ; but it is a good thing to change from perverse ways to righteousness.' The proconsul said again to him, 'If you despise the wild beasts, I will make you to be consumed by fire, unless you change your mind.' But Polycarp answered, 'You threaten me with fire that burns for a season and after a little while is put out, for you know not the fire of judgment to come, and of eternal punishment, which is kept

for the ungodly. But why do you delay? use what you will.' ”

All threats and persuasions having failed, the pro-consul sent his own crier to proclaim thrice in the middle of the stadium, “Polycarp has confessed himself to be a Christian.” Upon this the whole multitude, Gentiles and Jews alike, were filled with fury and shouted, “This is the teacher of all Asia, the father of the Christians. It is he who casts down our gods. He teaches many not to sacrifice nor worship.” The public games in Asiatic cities were presided over by officers who bore the name of Asiarchs. They are referred to in the Acts of the Apostles, where we are told that “certain of the chief of Asia” were St. Paul’s friends, and persuaded him not to appear in the theatre. This office at Smyrna was held at the time of Polycarp’s death by a man named Philip. The multitude called upon Philip to let loose a lion upon Polycarp. Philip refused. He said that the appointed time of the games was over, and that what was demanded of him was beyond his power. Then a shout was raised which soon became universal, that Polycarp should be burnt alive. It was a recognised punishment in Roman law for men disloyal to the emperors. Thus Polycarp’s own prophecy came to be fulfilled. Immediately the crowd set to work to gather together logs and faggots from the workshops and the public baths. The Jews took a foremost part in these proceedings. “It was their wont to do so,” say the writers of the narrative.

“As soon as the bonfire was prepared, Polycarp laid aside all his upper garments for himself, and undid his girdle, and essayed also to take off his shoes. Before this time he was never allowed to do it, because the faithful vied with one another to be allowed to touch his

feet. For even before his hair turned white he had been deeply revered because of his good conversation." The instruments for his martyrdom were placed around him, but when they were about to nail him to the stake, he said, "Let me be as I am. He who has granted me to endure the fire will grant me also to remain at the pile without flinching; the security of your nails will not be wanted." Accordingly they refrained from nailing him, and only fastened him with a rope. "Polycarp placed his hands behind him, and was bound for sacrifice like a notable ram out of a mighty flock, prepared as a whole burnt-offering acceptable to God. He looked up to heaven and said, 'Lord God Almighty, Father of Thy beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ, through whom we have received the knowledge of Thee, O God of angels and powers and of all creation, and of all the kindred of the righteous who live before Thee, I bless Thee that Thou hast counted me worthy of this day and hour, to receive a portion among the number of the martyrs in the cup of Christ for the resurrection of soul and body to eternal life in the incorruptibility of the Holy Ghost. O that I may be received among them to-day before Thee in full and acceptable sacrifice, according as Thou didst prepare beforehand, and didst reveal it unto me, and hast now fulfilled it, O true God who canst not lie. For this cause and for all things I praise Thee, I bless Thee, I glorify Thee, through the eternal and heavenly High Priest, Jesus Christ, Thy beloved Son, through whom unto Thee, with Him and with the Holy Ghost, be glory now and ever and unto all ages.'"

It was especially noticed how he finished his prayer with the solemn "Amen" which was used at the Christian Eucharist. No sooner had he reached

that word than the firemen kindled the fire. "Then," say the writers, "a mighty flame blazed forth, and we, to whom it was given to see, saw a wondrous sight. Yea, we were preserved to tell to others what happened. The fire took the form of an arch, like the sail of a ship filled with the wind, and encompassed the body of the martyr with a wall, and there it stood in the midst, not like flesh burning, but like bread baking in the oven, or like gold and silver refined in a furnace. We smelt so sweet a savour as though frankincense or some other precious spices were breathed upon the air." The fire was so long in doing its work upon Polycarp's body that those in charge grew impatient and ordered an executioner to go up to him and plunge a dagger into him. He did so, and the Christian spectators affirm that such a gush of blood followed upon the stroke that it checked the flames of the fire, and all the multitude marvelled, and saw that this man was not like one of themselves.

A deep disappointment awaited those loving disciples who had reckoned so highly the honour of taking off the shoes of the saint. The envious adversary of the righteous, they say, grudged them the satisfaction of doing honour to his corpse. The father of Herod, the head of the police, who had a Christian sister, entreated the magistrate not to give the body to the Christians, "lest," he said, "they should leave the Crucified and begin to worship Polycarp." The Jews joined in the entreaty, mounting guard over the burning pile, lest the Christians should take the body away. "They do not know," say the narrators, "that we can never leave Christ who suffered for the salvation of the saved of all the world, the spotless One for sinners, nor worship any other. Him we adore as being the Son of God; but the martyrs, as disciples and imitators of the

Lord, we love, as they deserve, for their unsurpassed devotion to their own King and Teacher, and we pray that we may be fellow-partakers and fellow-disciples with them."

The centurion, seeing the opposition of the Jews, set the body of Polycarp in the midst of the pile, and burnt it according to the usual fashion of the heathen. "Thus afterwards," say the Christians of Smyrna, "we were able to gather up his bones, which are more precious than costly stones and finer than gold, and we laid them where it was meet. There, when time permits, the Lord will suffer us to assemble with gladness and joy to celebrate the martyr's birthday, for the remembrance of those who have already passed through the conflict, and for the training and preparation of those who shall do so hereafter."

The account was written by the Christians of Smyrna soon after the events which it relates, and sent to their brethren at a place called Philomelion. The Christians of Philomelion had heard of the death of Polycarp, and asked for a circumstantial account of it. The writers beg the brethren at Philomelion to circulate the letter amongst the churches beyond them, that they also may join in glorifying the Lord.<sup>1</sup>

St. Irenæus of Lyons, who had been a disciple of Polycarp, was at Rome at the time of his master's martyrdom. At the precise hour when Polycarp was put to death at Smyrna, Irenæus heard a voice as of a trumpet saying, "Polycarp has died a martyr's death." He is said to have made the statement himself in one of his written works.

About the same date a group of martyrdoms took

<sup>1</sup> Lightfoot's *Apostolic Fathers* (ed. 2), Part II., vol. iii. p. 353 foll.; or Funk's *Patres Apostolici*, vol. i. p. 315 foll.



place at Rome, which show how completely the very name and profession of being a Christian was enough to cause death, without any attempt being made to prove that the accused was guilty of further crimes. A woman was converted to Christianity, and thereupon refused to join her heathen husband in practices which were against her conscience. At last, after patient trial, it became necessary for her to use that liberty which St. Paul allows to a Christian married to a heathen partner, and to obtain a legal release from him. The profligate husband denounced her as a Christian. She applied to the emperor to put off the hearing of her case until she had settled her private affairs, and the request was granted. Baffled for the present in his desire for vengeance against the woman, the divorced husband turned upon the man who had been her instructor in the faith, whose name was Ptolemy. He had a friend who was a centurion. He persuaded the centurion to arrest Ptolemy, and cast him into irons, and "to interrogate him on this one point, whether he were a Christian." Ptolemy, who was a guileless and truthful man, confessed that he was, and was kept in a miserable confinement. After a long delay he was brought before the prefect of the city of Rome, called Urbicus. Like the centurion, Urbicus asked him no other question but whether he were a Christian. Ptolemy, who knew that he owed to Christianity everything that was best in life, made the same simple avowal as before, and was condemned to death. As he was led from the tribunal, a Christian named Lucius who was present cried aloud and asked Urbicus what was the ground of his sentence. "This man," he said, "has not been convicted of adultery, or murder, or robbery, or any

other crime ; you punish him simply because he acknowledged the name of a Christian. Urbicus, that is not a judgment that suits an emperor bearing the name of Pius, nor Cæsar's son, the philosopher, nor the Senate—the sacred Senate." The reply of Urbicus was, "I suppose that you are the same as Ptolemy." "Certainly," said Lucius. The prefect ordered him to share the fate of Ptolemy. Lucius thanked him ; and a third Christian who acted in the same manner was added to the former two.<sup>1</sup>

A beautiful account of the Christian life of those times is contained in a little anonymous writing known to us as the Epistle to Diognetus. Diognetus appears to have been a high official, and perhaps, like Pliny, was at a loss to know why he was compelled to take action against the Christians. His informant describes him as "seeking earnestly to know what God they believe in, and what that worship of Him is which enables them to despise the world, and to brave death." "Christians," he tells him, "are not marked off from other men by country, by language, or by manner of life. They live in Greek or barbarian cities, according to the appointed lot of each, and follow the local customs in dress and diet and so forth, although the nature of their own social ideal is acknowledged to be wonderful and surprising. They live in their own country, but as sojourners in it ; they have their part in everything as citizens, and bear everything like strangers ; every foreign country is a home to them, and every home a foreign country. They obey the established laws, and surpass the laws by their own lives. They love all men, and are persecuted by all. Men do not understand them, and condemn them ;

<sup>1</sup> Justin, *Apol.* ii. 2.

they are put to death, and find life thereby. They are poor, and make many rich ; they lack all things, and abound in all. They are dishonoured, and glory in the dishonour ; they are slandered, and are found righteous ; they are reviled, and they bless ; they are shamefully treated, and they pay respect. They do good, and are punished as evil ; when they are punished, they rejoice as if life were given them. The Jews make war against them as aliens, and the Greeks persecute them ; and those who hate them cannot give a reason for their enmity.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Printed in Otto's *Justin*, or in Funk's *Patres Apostolici*.



## CHAPTER III

### JUSTIN AND THE MARTYRS OF LYONS

THE Christian Church fared worse under the emperor Marcus Aurelius than it had done under any emperor since the times of Nero and Domitian. Marcus Aurelius was himself a noble man ; but he was a philosopher, and his philosophy was not that of the Church. Lenient and merciful towards other classes of offenders against the law, he had a peculiar dislike to the Christians. He hated them with the hatred of a professional for a set of ignorant and self-taught amateurs. His own philosophy was that of the Stoics, which taught men to bear pain and death without fear. It might have been thought that he would have sympathised with the heroism of the Christian martyrs, but it was not so. In one passage of his writings he refers to the calmness with which Christians met death, in order to contrast it with the true courage of a Stoic. The true courage, he thought, was displayed when men sought death by their own act of choice ; the Christians died out of "sheer obstinacy." A Stoic's courage was reasonable and dignified, and therefore impressive, whereas a Christian's was affected and theatrical. Marcus had no admiration for such courage, and when he had to deal with Christians he strained the law to make their sufferings more bitter.

The most famous sufferer in the reign of Marcus Aurelius was the philosopher Justin. A native of

Samaria, but of purely Gentile origin, Justin sought instruction in his youth from one form of heathen philosophy after another. The Stoics, the Peripatetics, the Pythagoreans, the Platonists alike disappointed him. One day while he was pacing in meditation near the seashore—probably at Ephesus—he met an old man whose dignity and gentleness attracted him. He gazed so intently at him that the old man asked if he knew him. They fell into conversation together, and the old man told him that there was a higher and more satisfying philosophy than any which he had yet studied, taught by inspired prophets whose words had been fulfilled in Christ. The old man bade him to pray that the gates of light might be opened to him, that he might understand the things which could only be known by gift of God and of His Christ. Justin never saw the old man again, but his soul was left all on fire, he says, with desire to know those friends of Christ of whom the old man had spoken. Without ceasing to be a philosopher he became a Christian.

The philosophical education of Justin fitted him to be the first of those who are called the Apologists, or writers in defence of Christianity. The Apologies are among the most valuable documents for the study of the early Church, its practices and its beliefs. Thus the Apology of Athenagoras is of great importance for the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, and the newly recovered Apology of Aristides for the history of the Creed. In two works of this kind Justin addressed himself to the Roman emperor and to the senate. The sight of Christian fortitude awoke in him a different feeling from that which it aroused in the mind of Marcus Aurelius. "While I was myself

contented with the doctrines of Plato," he writes, "when I heard Christians accused, and saw them advance fearlessly to meet death and everything that is thought terrible, I felt that it was impossible that these men should be living a life of vicious pleasure, as was supposed." He felt that it was the duty of any Christian who was qualified for the task, to tell the public what Christianity really was: otherwise the responsibility for their persecution rested upon the Christians themselves. With this view he not only set forth with remarkable freedom the beliefs of Christians, and the reasons upon which they were grounded, but even gave a full account of those secret meetings of the Christians which were suspected by the heathen to have an immoral purpose. He told his readers how the converts to Christianity were regenerated by the use of water in the name of the Holy Trinity; and how, on the day which is called Sunday, all those who lived in town or country gathered together to hear the writings of the apostles and of the prophets read and expounded; and how the president of the brethren took bread and a mixture of wine and water, and prayed and gave thanks over it; and how the food thus consecrated was called the Eucharist or Thanksgiving; and how the Christians were taught to consider it to be the flesh and blood of Jesus, the Son of God Incarnate.

By this bold and outspoken championship of his belief Justin brought upon himself the enmity of a philosopher of the Cynic school, named Crescens, whose ignorance Justin had exposed. Justin had himself foreseen that Crescens would do him a mischief if he could, and said that the man could be no true philosopher who abused the Christians for the sake of

popularity, without ever having read what they taught. It seems probable that Crescens had some share in bringing his opponent to his end.

The title of Martyr, which has become like a second name to Justin, was earned at Rome about the year 163. In company with six other Christians he was brought to the tribunal of Rusticus, the prefect of the city, an intimate friend and formerly an instructor of the emperor. The prefect bade him obey the gods and submit to the emperors. Justin answered, "There is nothing that deserves blame or condemnation in our obeying the commandments of our Saviour Jesus Christ." Rusticus asked what system of doctrine Justin professed. He answered, "After endeavouring to understand all the various systems, I gave my adhesion to the true doctrines of the Christians, although they do not please those who are in error." "Unhappy man," said the prefect, "do those doctrines please you?" "Yes," said Justin, "their tenets are right, and I follow them." "What are their tenets?" said Rusticus. Justin answered, "We worship the God of the Christians, whom we believe to be but One, the Maker and the Fashioner of all creation, visible and invisible; and the Lord Jesus Christ His Son, of whom it was foretold by the prophets that He should come to mankind as the Preacher of salvation and the Teacher of good learning. A man like me is unable to speak worthily of His infinite Godhead. I acknowledge that it needs a prophet's power. I know that the prophets of old time foretold His coming to men." Rusticus questioned him no more about his doctrine. "Where do you assemble?" he asked. Justin replied, "Wherever we will and can. You cannot imagine that we all assemble at the same place. Far from it; the God of

the Christians is not confined to a locality. He is invisible, and fills the heaven and the earth, and is worshipped and glorified in every place by the faithful." "Come, tell me," said the prefect, "where do you assemble? What is the place where you gather your disciples?" Justin answered, "I am lodging with a man called Martin, above the Timothine Baths. This is my second visit to Rome, and during all this time I know of no other place of assembly except his. If any one liked to visit me I imparted to him the words of truth." "To come to the point, then," said Rusticus, "you are a Christian?" "Yes," said Justin, "I am a Christian."

Rusticus then applied himself to the companions of Justin. "Tell me now, Chariton, are you a Christian too?" "I am a Christian by the commandment of God." "Charito, what do you say?" "I am a Christian by the free gift of God." "And you, Evelpistus, what are you?" Evelpistus was a slave of the emperor, and he answered, "I too am a Christian, set free by Christ, and I share the same hope by the grace of Christ." Rusticus asked the same question of Hierax. "Yes," he replied, "I am a Christian; I worship and adore the same God." "Did Justin make Christians of you?" said the prefect. Hierax answered, "I was a Christian before, and shall continue to be so." A man called Paeon then stood up and said, "I also am a Christian." "Who taught you?" asked Rusticus. Paeon said, "We have received this good confession from our parents." The slave Evelpistus spoke again: "I was glad to hear the teaching of Justin," he said, "but I also received my Christianity from my parents." "Where are your parents?" Rusticus asked. He said, "In Cappadocia." "Where are your parents?" asked



Rusticus of Hierax. He answered, "Our true Father is Christ, and faith in Him is our mother, but my earthly parents are dead, and I was carried off from Iconium in Phrygia, and brought to this place." Rusticus turned to the last of the group, whose name was Liberian: "And what do you say? Are you a Christian? Will not you worship?" Liberian answered, "I also am a Christian; I worship and adore the only true God."

The prefect then spoke again to Justin. "Listen to me," he said; "you are said to be a clever man, and I think that you know what is true. If you are scourged and your head cut off, do you believe that you will go up to heaven?" Justin replied that he hoped for blessings from God, and that he knew that at the end of the world men who had lived Christian lives would be rewarded. "Do you then suppose," said the prefect, "that you will go up into heaven and receive a recompense?" "I do not suppose it," said Justin; "I know it, and am persuaded of it." "Enough," said Rusticus. "Let us come to the matter of practical importance. Agree together and join in sacrificing to the gods." Justin answered, "No one in his senses turns from godliness to ungodliness." "If you do not obey," said Rusticus, "you shall all be punished without mercy." Justin replied, "It is our prayer that we may be punished for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, and so saved. This will be our salvation and our confidence at a more dreadful tribunal than yours—the universal tribunal of our Master and Saviour." The other martyrs joined in and cried, "Do what you will. We are Christians, and we do not sacrifice to idols." Rusticus gave sentence. "Let those who will not sacrifice to the gods and obey



the commandment of the emperor, be scourged and taken away to execution, suffering capital punishment, according to the course of the law." The martyrs gave glory to God, and were led to the accustomed place of execution, where their heads were severed from their bodies. Some of the faithful came by stealth and carried off the remains, and buried them in a suitable place, "being aided," says the primitive account, "by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."<sup>1</sup>

Several of the companions of St. Justin were natives of what we now call Asia Minor. That country was, indeed, during the second century, the great seed-bed of Christianity. The Christian churches of Gaul, in particular, were very closely bound to those of Asia Minor. The city of Marseilles was founded, 600 years before Christ, by a colony of Asiatic Greeks, and the connexion had ever since been maintained. Greek commerce had spread up the valley of the Rhone, and the towns of Vienne and of Lyons, on the banks of that noble river, were largely Greek-speaking towns. Flourishing churches existed in these two cities by the middle of the second century. That of Lyons was presided over by a bishop named Pothinus, who had in all probability, like Polycarp, been a disciple of St. John in the Asiatic home of his youth.

These churches experienced a terrible persecution in the reign of Marcus Aurelius. When the worst of it was over, they wrote an account of their troubles to the brethren in the east, which forms one of the most precious of all the records of primitive Christianity: "The servants of Christ who dwell at Vienne and Lyons to the brethren throughout Asia and Phrygia

<sup>1</sup> Otto's *Justin* (ed. 3), vol. iii. p. 266.

who have the same faith and hope of redemption with us, peace and grace and glory from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord." Such is their opening address ; and they proceed, "It is beyond our power to tell you in detail, and indeed it is impossible for any writing to describe the greatness of the persecution here, and of the fury of the heathen against the saints, and of all that the blessed martyrs endured. The adversary fell upon us with all his force, giving us a prelude of that unrestrained 'coming' of his which will be hereafter."

The anti-christian movement began, as it frequently does, with a social form of persecution. Christians were "excluded from houses, and from the public baths, and from the market." By-and-by they could not show themselves anywhere in public. "But the grace of God," they say, "took the field against the foe, and delivered the weak, and set up firm pillars against the evil one, who by their endurance succeeded in drawing all his onslaught upon themselves. They met him hand to hand, enduring every form of reproach and of punishment ; and, reckoning their many afflictions but few, they hastened unto Christ, showing verily that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be reckoned in comparison with the glory that shall be revealed to usward."

The social exclusion with which the persecution began soon gave place to more active hostility. The conspicuous members of the community became the objects of popular violence. They were hooted and hustled in the streets. Blows fell upon them. Their clothes were torn from their backs. Stones were thrown at them. If they entered into a building, a mob besieged the door. "Everything that an

infuriated crowd loves to do to those whom it hates and treats as enemies" was done to them.

Then matters came to the judicial stage. In spite of a rescript of Hadrian, which, about the year 126, had forbidden magistrates to take action against Christians under the pressure of popular clamour, "they were led into the market-place by the tribune," or military commander, "and by the authorities of the city, and were examined in the presence of the whole populace, and, on confessing, they were shut up in the gaol until the arrival of the governor.

"Then they were brought before the governor, who used all the ferocity to which we are accustomed. While this was going on, one of the brethren, Vettius Epagathus, who had in his heart all the fulness of love towards God and his neighbour, whose life had been brought to such perfection that, though he was young, he deserved the same testimony which is borne to the aged Zacharias, for he 'walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless,' and was untiring in the service of his neighbour, having a great zeal for God, and fervent in the spirit—this Vettius Epagathus could not bear the judgment so unreasonably given against us, but was exceeding wroth, and begged that he might himself be heard in defence of the brethren to show that there is nothing ungodly or impious amongst us." These two words are evidently used in their strict sense, and they imply that the charges brought against the Christians were those of sacrilege and of treason. The first was based upon the Christian refusal to worship the heathen gods, the second upon the refusal to worship the emperor. This was what Vettius Epagathus wished to explain. "But those who were about the judgment-seat shouted

him down, for he was a well-known person ; and the governor would not listen to the just request which he preferred, but asked him this one question, whether he were himself a Christian. Epagathus confessed it with a loud voice, and was immediately promoted into the sacred order of the martyrs, being styled the advocate of the Christians, and having in himself the Advocate, even the Spirit, in greater abundance than Zacharias. This he showed by the fulness of love, being pleased for the defence of his brethren even to lay down his own life. For he was," and the writers add with a sublime simplicity of faith, "and he is, a genuine disciple of Christ, following the Lamb whithersoever He goeth."

Now ensued a moment of hesitation and fear, which the writers record as faithfully as the moments of triumph and glory. "A division made itself felt between the rest. Some showed themselves ready to take the lead and be first martyrs of the persecution ; and these fulfilled the confession of their martyrdom with all alacrity. But at the same time there was a disclosure of those who were unready, and unpractised, and still weak and unable to bear the strain of so great a contest. Of these about ten in number miscarried, who caused us great grief and sorrow beyond measure, and hindered the alacrity of the rest who had not been apprehended ; who, although subjected to all inconveniences, still were in company with the martyrs and did not forsake them. Then, indeed, we all were greatly afraid, because no man could make sure who would and who would not confess—not that we feared the punishments which were used, but because we looked on to the end and dreaded lest one or another of us might fall away. However, day after

day those who were worthy were taken into custody, supplying the place of those who had miscarried, so that all the most earnest, who had been our mainstay here, were gathered together out of the two churches."

The cause of justice had already been violated when the Christians were apprehended to satisfy a tumultuous demand. It was now to be further violated. Trajan had expressly ordered that Christians were not to be sought out. It was also a rule of Roman law that the evidence of a slave could not be accepted against his master. Both these provisions were set aside by the magistrates at Lyons.

"Certain heathen servants of ours," say the writers of the letter, "were also apprehended, because the governor published orders that we should all be sought out. These slaves, through the lying in wait of Satan, being terrified at the tortures which they saw the saints suffer, and being instigated to do so by the soldiers, bore false witness of us, and said that we held banquets like those of Thyestes," who fed his guests with the flesh of children, "and were guilty of incest like that of Oedipus," who was married to his mother, "and did things which not only is it unlawful for us to speak or think of, but which it is impossible to believe were ever done amongst men. When these things were noised abroad, all men were wild with fury against us, so that even those who before were kept within bounds by private friendship now became exceedingly bitter, and were cut to the heart in their anger against us; and that was fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord, 'The time will come wherein whosoever killeth you will think that he offereth a service to God.'

"Upon this the holy martyrs were subjected to torments that pass all description. It was Satan's



ambition to make them also utter some of these calumnies against the Christians. In an especial manner, all the wrath, both of the populace, and of the governor, and of the soldiers, lighted upon Sanctus, a deacon from Vienne, and upon Maturus, who was only newly enlightened, but a noble champion nevertheless, and upon Attalus, a native of Pergamos, who had always been a pillar and ground of the church here, and upon one Blandina, through whom Christ showed that the things which amongst men are held cheap and insignificant and contemptible, are esteemed worthy of great glory with God, because of her love towards Him—a love which was shown in power, and did not glory in appearance. For while we were all alarmed, and her mistress according to the flesh”—for Blandina was a slave—“who was herself one of the martyr champions, was in anguish lest the weakness of Blandina’s body should prevent her from making her confession boldly, Blandina was filled with such power that she outwearied and exhausted those who tortured her in every form and shape in relays from dawn till nightfall, so that they acknowledged that they were beaten, having nothing more that they could do to her, and were astonished that she yet remained alive, when her whole body was lacerated all over and laid open; and they confessed that one kind of racking was enough to have fetched her soul out, not to speak of so many and so tremendous. But the blessed woman, like a noble athlete, grew young again by her confession, and she found recovery and refreshment and insensibility to all that was done to her in repeating, ‘I am a Christian,’ and ‘There is nothing vile done amongst us.’



“Sanctus nobly endured all the outrages of men in a way that surpassed human power. While the ungodly hoped, through the long continuance and the greatness of his tortures, to hear from his lips of something wrong, he set himself against them with such constancy, that he would not even tell them his own name, nor of what nation or city he was, nor whether he were bond or free, but to every question that was put to him he answered in Latin, ‘I am a Christian.’ Instead of name, and city, and race, and everything, this was what he confessed again and again, and other word from him the heathen heard none. So there arose a great contention between the governor and the tormentors and him; and when they no longer had anything else that they could do to him, at last they applied red hot plates of brass to the most sensitive portions of his body. So those parts were burned; but he remained inflexible and unyielding, firm in his confession, bedewed and strengthened by the heavenly fountain of the water of life which proceedeth out of the side of Christ. His poor body was a witness of what had been done to him, being all one wound and weal, and all contracted, having lost the outward form of a human being. Christ, suffering in him, achieved great glories, bringing to nought the adversary, and showing, by an example for the rest to copy, that there is nothing to be feared where the love of the Father is, and nothing painful where is the glory of Christ. For the ungodly, after some days, again put the martyr on the rack, and thought that in the swollen and inflamed condition of his body, if they applied the same instruments of torture they would get the better of him, seeing that he could not even bear the touch of a hand; or else they hoped that his dying under the

torments would strike fear into the rest. But so far was this from being the case, that contrary to all expectation of men, he lifted up his head again, and his poor body became straight once more in the later inflictions, and he recovered his former appearance and the use of his limbs, so that through the grace of Christ his second racking was made to him no punishment but a healing.

“There was one Biblias amongst those who had denied, and the devil, thinking that he had devoured her already, but wishing to ensure her condemnation by making her add blasphemy to her denial, brought her to torture, to compel her to utter the impieties with which we were charged, as one who had already proved easy to crush and a poor coward. But she recovered herself under the torments, and woke up as it were out of a deep sleep. The temporal penalty reminded her of the eternal punishment in hell, and she answered contrariwise to the blasphemous charges, and said, ‘How can they eat little children, when it is not lawful for them even to eat the blood of brute beasts?’ and from that moment she confessed herself a Christian, and was added to the sacred order of the martyrs.

“When, through the endurance of these blessed ones, the tortures of the tyrants were brought to nought by Christ, the devil bethought of him of other contrivances, such as confinement in the dark in the worst part of the prison, stretching of the feet in the stocks to the fifth hole, and other outrages which enraged underlings, full of the devil, are fond of inflicting upon those in prison. The consequence was that most of them were stifled in the gaol; that is to say, those whom the Lord willed so to depart. In this way He displayed His own glory. For some who had been

severely tormented, so that they seemed unlikely to live, even with the best of care, continued in the gaol, destitute of succour from men, but strengthened and invigorated by the Lord both in body and soul, and cheering and encouraging the rest. But those who were young, and had only lately been apprehended, whose bodies had as yet suffered no outrage, could not bear the burden of confinement, and died within the gaol.

“The blessed Pothinus, to whom was entrusted the bishopric of Lyons, was himself dragged to the judgment seat. Pothinus was more than ninety years of age and in very bad health. In fact he was already barely alive through sickness ; but he was reinforced by readiness of the spirit. The desire for martyrdom sustained him ; and though his body was broken both by old age and by sickness, his soul was kept within him, in order that Christ might triumph through it. He was brought by the soldiers to the judgment seat, to which the authorities of the city sent him on, while the multitude raised all manner of outcries against him, as if he were Christ Himself. There he witnessed his good confession. Being asked by the governor who was the God of the Christians, he said, ‘Thou shalt know if thou art worthy.’ No sooner had he said this, than he was mercilessly set upon, and all manner of blows were laid upon him. Those who were near, not even respecting his old age, contemptuously struck him with hands and feet, while those at a distance flung at him whatever came to hand, and all thought that they would be guilty of crime and treason if any one failed to take part in abusing him. In this way they thought to avenge their own gods. Barely alive, he was flung into the gaol, and after two days breathed his last.”

The holy writers go on to record what they call a "dispensation (or providence) of God," "such as," they say, "has rarely been seen in the brotherhood, but which gives an indication of the art of Christ." The rule, since the time of Trajan, had always been, as that emperor laid down, that those who denied that they were Christians should be set free. This rule, like others which favoured the Christians, was not observed at Lyons. Those who had denied their faith at the time when the first arrests were made, were nevertheless shut up in prison, and shared the experiences of their more courageous brethren. "But while those who confessed what they were," says the letter, "were shut up as Christians, and no other charge was made against them, these others were confined as murderers and felons, and were punished twice as much as the rest. While the one were relieved by the joy of martyrdom, and the hope of the promises, and their love towards Christ, and the Spirit of the Father, the others were grievously punished by their conscience, so that their countenances were readily distinguished by casual observers as they passed to and fro. The one advanced blithely with an expression of glory and great joy, so that they wore their bonds like a goodly ornament, as a bride adorned with cunningly wrought fringes of gold; and at the same time they gave forth the sweet savour of Christ in such a way that some deemed that they were anointed with earthly perfumes. But the others walked with downcast, dejected, miserable looks, covered with all confusion, and besides all else, the heathen themselves taunted them as base and cowardly, while they bore the accusation of murderers, but had lost the honourable and glorious and life-giving appellation of Christians. The rest saw these things and were

strengthened, and such as were arrested confessed without hesitation, paying no heed to the arguments of the devil."

At this point Eusebius, to whom we owe the preservation of the narrative, omits some sentences of the letter, and passes on to the final scenes.

"The forms of death by which their martyrdom was completed," say the survivors, "differed widely. They presented to the Father a single wreath, but it was woven of divers colours and blossoms of every kind. It was meet that the noble athletes should receive the great crown of immortality after enduring a varied contest and gaining a mighty victory.

"Maturus, Sanctus, Blandina, and Attalus were led out to the wild beasts in public, to provide the heathen community with a barbarous spectacle. An exhibition was given on purpose for our brethren. Maturus and Sanctus again went through every form of infliction in the amphitheatre, as if they had suffered nothing at all before, or rather as if they had already worsted the opponent in many contests, and now were striving for the crown itself. Once more they were made to go in and out between the whips, according to the custom there, and were dragged this way and that way by the beasts, and bore everything which voices here and there in the infuriated crowd suggested and demanded. At last they were placed in the iron chair, in which their bodies were broiled so that the stench of them filled their nostrils. Even this did not satisfy the tormentors. On the contrary, they grew even more furious in their desire to break down the endurance of the martyrs. Yet no other word fell from Sanctus except the confession which he had constantly uttered from the beginning. So at last they were sacrificed, after living



through a great and protracted conflict, in which throughout that day, instead of all the variety of the usual exhibitions, they and they only were made a spectacle unto the world.

“Blandina was hung upon a stake and exposed to be devoured by the wild beasts which were turned loose upon her. The sight of her hanging crosswise, joined with her fervent prayer, put great heart into the combatants ; for amidst the combat their sister enabled them to behold, even with their bodily eyes, Him who was crucified for them, to assure believers that every one who suffers for the glory of Christ has fellowship for ever with the living God. None of the wild beasts would then touch her ; so she was taken down from the tree, and placed again in the gaol, and reserved for another combat, in order that her victory in repeated wrestlings might put the condemnation of the crooked serpent beyond question, and that the brethren might be encouraged by seeing how one so small and weak, and an object of contempt, could, when clothed with the great and unconquerable athlete Christ, overpower the adversary in many successive trials, and be crowned in fair combat with the crown of immortality.

“Attalus was loudly called for by the populace, for he was a well-known man. A good conscience enabled him to enter the lists readily ; for he was thoroughly practised in Christian discipline, and had always been a witness for the truth among us. He was led round the amphitheatre, with a board carried before him upon which was written in Latin, ‘This is Attalus the Christian.’ The people were greatly inflamed against him, but the governor on learning that he was a Roman citizen ordered him to be taken back to the gaol, and placed with the rest who were there, and wrote to



the emperor concerning them, and waited for his answer."

The mean season was not idly or unfruitfully spent. The letter says that "through the living the dead were brought to life, and those who were martyrs reconciled those who had failed to be martyrs; and great joy was given to the Virgin Mother"—such is the beautiful title by which the Church is described—"at receiving back alive those miscarried ones whom she had brought forth dead. The greater number of those who had denied were conceived anew, and filled with a new principle of life, and kindled into new flame; and they learned to confess, and now came to the judgment seat alive and vigorous;—for God who wills not the death of a sinner, and who shows His goodness in bringing men to repentance, mercifully granted to them that they should be examined again by the governor. The emperor's rescript ordered that the convicted Christians should be beaten to death, but that any who denied should be released. So at the beginning of the festival here,—a festival which attracts vast crowds from all the nations,—he brought the blessed brethren to the judgment seat, making a spectacle and an exhibition of them to the crowds. Once more he examined them, and those who were found to be possessed of the Roman citizenship were beheaded, and the rest were sent to the wild beasts.

"And Christ was greatly glorified in those who had formerly denied, who now, to the surprise of the heathen, confessed. These were examined by themselves, as a mere formality before setting them free. Upon their confessing, they were added to the sacred order of the martyrs. Only those remained outside who had never had a trace of faith, nor any knowledge

of the wedding garment, nor any notion of the fear of God, but who by their conversation brought the Christian way into ill repute, even the sons of perdition.

"The rest were all added to the Church. While they were being examined, one Alexander, a Phrygian by birth, and a physician by profession, who had spent many years in Gaul, and was known to almost every one by his love of God and his great freedom of speech—he was indeed endowed with something of the apostolic gift—took his stand near the judgment seat, and by his gestures encouraged them to confess, so that those who stood round the judgment seat noticed that he seemed like one travailing with child. The multitudes, incensed at the confession of those who had formerly denied, raised an outcry against Alexander, that it was his doing. So the governor called him to the bar, and asked him who and what he was; and when he said, 'A Christian,' the governor angrily condemned him to the wild beasts. The next day he entered the arena with Attalus; for to please the crowd"—it was a deliberate breach of the imperial orders—"the governor exposed Attalus again to the beasts. They underwent all the instruments of torture which are used in the amphitheatre, and, after enduring a very great conflict, were at last sacrificed. Alexander never uttered a groan or a sound, but communed in his heart with God; but Attalus, when he was placed in the iron chair, and the smell of his burning body rose up, said to the multitude in Latin, 'Look! this is eating men; it is you who do it. We neither eat men, nor do anything else that is wrong.' When he was asked what name God has, he answered, 'God has not a name like a man.'

"After all these, on the last day of the fight with

the wild beasts, Blandina was again introduced, in company with a boy of about fifteen years of age, called Ponticus. Every day these two had been brought in to look on while the others were tortured, and attempts were made to induce them to swear by the heathen idols. Because they remained steadfast and set them at naught, the populace grew too savage with them to pity the tender age of the boy or to respect the sex of the woman. They submitted them to all the horrors, and took them through the whole round of torture, again and again endeavouring to make them swear, but without success. Encouraged by his sister, so that the heathen saw her urging and strengthening him, Ponticus nobly endured all the tortures and gave up the ghost. The blessed Blandina last of all, like a mother of high degree"—it must be remembered that she was a slave—"after encouraging her children and sending them before her as conquerors to the King, and making all their conflicts her own, hastened to join her sons and daughters, rejoicing and making merry over her departure, as though she were invited to a marriage supper, not cast to wild beasts. After the scourges, after the wild beasts, after the frying-pan, at last she was cast into a net and exposed to a bull, and when she had been well tossed by the animal, unconscious of what was done to her, because the things which she believed were to her a hope and stay, and because of her communing with Christ, she too was sacrificed, the heathen themselves confessing that never among them had any woman suffered so many and such terrible tortures."

The letter goes on to say that the rage of the heathen was not even yet satisfied. Their hostility found another and a peculiar occasion in the dead

bodies of the martyrs. They seemed to have lost the power of acting by reason like human beings ; and their defeat only inflamed their fury, like that of a wild beast. The governor and the populace joined together in their determination to outrage Christian feeling. The survivors saw in it a fulfilment of the Scripture, "He that is wicked, let him be wicked still ; and he that is righteous, let him be justified still." "Those who had died of suffocation in the prison," we read, "they cast to dogs, carefully watching over them night and day lest we should attend to any of them. The mangled and charred relics of the others which were left by the wild beasts and by the fire, were in a similar manner exposed unburied, together with the severed heads and other portions of their bodies, and a military guard was mounted over them for several days. Some raged and gnashed their teeth over them, seeking to inflict some further vengeance upon them ; others laughed and mocked, magnifying their idols and ascribing to them the punishment of the martyrs. Those who were more reasonable, and who seemed to a certain extent to sympathise, upbraided them greatly, saying 'Where is their God ? and what good have they gained by the service which they preferred even to life.' Thus they differed in their attitude towards us. We meanwhile were in great sorrow because we were unable to bury the bodies. Night gave us no help towards that end ; money was of no avail ; prayers produced no relenting. The watch was maintained in every direction, as if some great advantage would be gained by preventing them from being buried.

"The bodies of the martyrs, after being treated with every indignity, and exposed to the weather for six

days, were then burned by the ungodly and reduced to ashes, and strewed upon the river Rhone, which flows hard by, so that no relic of them might remain upon the earth. This was done under the idea of prevailing against God and depriving the martyrs of the regeneration, in order that, as was actually said, they might have no chance of rising again. 'It is this expectation,' they affirmed, 'which makes them introduce among us a new and foreign religion, teaching them to despise all terrors, and to go to death readily and with joy. Now let us see whether they will rise again, and whether their God is able to succour them and to deliver them out of our hands.'"

The modesty of these devoted Christians, and their consideration for their weaker brethren, are well shown in one or two more sentences which Eusebius has preserved out of this wonderful epistle.

"They were indeed followers and imitators of Christ, who, being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be grasped to be on an equality with God. In the height of their glory, when they had endured not only one or two martyrdoms but many, after being brought back the second time from the wild beasts, with their bodies all covered with burns and stripes and wounds, they neither proclaimed themselves martyrs, nor allowed us to address them by that title ; and if ever one of us chanced to call them so in a letter or in speaking, they reprov'd him severely. They rejoiced to leave the title of martyr to Christ, the faithful and true Martyr, and the first-begotten of the dead, and the Captain of the life of God ; and they remembered the martyrs who had already departed this life, and said, 'Those were martyrs who,



by Christ's permission, were taken away in their confession, whose martyrdom He sealed by their departure ; we are poor, lowly confessors.' And with tears they besought the brethren, and begged the offering of earnest prayers that they might be perfected"—that is, by martyrdom.

After a few more sentences the letter continues :—

"They humbled themselves under the mighty hand, by which they are now greatly exalted. During those days they made their defence unto all, but denounced none ; they set all at liberty, and put none in chains ; they prayed for their ill-wishers like the perfect martyr Stephen, 'Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.' And if he made request for those who stoned him, how much more for the brethren ?

"This was the greatest warfare that they had with the Evil Beast, because of their genuine love, that he might be forced to bring up again alive those whom he thought that he had devoured. They did not vaunt themselves against the fallen ; where they themselves abounded they imparted to those who lacked, for they had the hearts of mothers, and shed many tears for them to the Father. They asked life of Him, and He gave it them, and they shared it with their neighbours. Conquerors at every point, they departed to God ; and having always loved peace, and having commended peace to us, they went in peace to God, not bequeathing affliction to their Mother, nor dissension and war to their brethren, but joy, and peace, and concord, and love." Eusebius sadly contrasts this record with the legacies bequeathed by some of the martyrs of a time nearer his own.

One anecdote is recorded by Eusebius, which shows even more touchingly the humility of these holy men.



There was one among them named Alcibiades, who had lived a very ascetic life before he was thrown into prison, never touching any food but bread and water. When first he was imprisoned he adhered rigidly to the same rule ; but after the first fight of Attalus in the amphitheatre "a revelation was made to that saint that Alcibiades was not doing well to refuse the creatures of God, and to leave an example which would prove a stumbling-block to others." Alcibiades thereupon gave up his lifelong practice, "and partook freely of all, and gave thanks to God."<sup>1</sup>

The persecution at Lyons continued for some time longer. The names of two martyrs are preserved who perished in the following year. They were Epipodius and Alexander—the former a native of the city, the latter a Greek by birth. They had been school-fellows in boyhood, and were united by a close friendship in the early manhood which was all that they were permitted to see. Being unable to escape to any distant place of safety, the two young men took up a lodging with a poor Christian widow who lived at the place now called Pierre Encise, on the high ground above the city. Diligent search was being made for the remaining Christians of the place, and the searchers came suddenly upon the friends in their lowly abode—so suddenly that Epipodius was carried off with only one shoe on, leaving the other to be treasured by the widow as a precious relic. After three days in prison they were examined, and confessed that they were Christians. To deprive them of mutual support they were tried separately. Epipodius bore his tortures bravely ; and when the multitude cried out for worse inflictions, the magistrate, who had seen or heard too

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* v. 1, 2, 3.

much of these tumultuary proceedings, thought good to maintain the dignity of his office by ordering him to be taken out of court and slain at once with the sword. Two days later Alexander was brought to the bar. On refusing to offer incense, he was beaten by relays of three executioners at a time ; but when at the end he was asked whether he persisted in his confession, he replied, "The gods of the heathen are devils. I commit my will to God Almighty." The magistrate said that, as the Christians made the length of their torments a matter of boasting, he would give him no more of them ; and he ordered him to be crucified. He was not long in dying. His body was exhausted with the scourging which it had endured, and with his last weary breath he called upon Christ.<sup>1</sup>

There seems to be some reason for placing in connexion with these martyrdoms that of a young man named Symphorian, who belonged to a good Christian family in the town of Autun. There, according to one account, which is in itself not incredible, he was baptized by a priest named Benignus, now the tutelary saint of Dijon, who is said to have been sent into Gaul with certain companions by St. Polycarp, and who himself suffered martyrdom about this time. The town of Autun was a centre of orgies which were identified with the Phrygian worship of Cybele, or Berecynthia. At a great celebration of the festival of this goddess, Symphorian was observed to withhold the customary marks of reverence ; and as Christians were at the time being sought out, he was brought before Heraclius, the governor. Heraclius asked the usual questions about his name and estate, to which he duly answered, "I am a Christian ; my name is Symphorian."

<sup>1</sup> Ruinart's *Acta Primorum Martyrum Sincera*, p. 63.

"Are you a Christian?" answered the governor in surprise; "you must have escaped our attention. There is not much profession of that name in these parts. Why do you despise the figure of the mother of the gods, and refuse to worship it?" "I have already told you," said Symphorian, "that I am a Christian. I worship the true God, who reigns in heaven. I do not worship the image of a devil; if you will give me leave, I should be glad to break it up with a mallet." The magistrate said that he was guilty not only of sacrilege, but of treason. He turned to his *officium*, or group of secretaries and agents, to ask whether Symphorian belonged to the place. He was informed that it was so, and that he was well connected. "You are jesting," he said to Symphorian; "you have heard of Christianity, but you know nothing about it, and are telling me lies. Perhaps you do not know the imperial orders. The *officium* shall read them to you." They did so; but Symphorian would not obey them. Heraclius ordered the lictors to beat him and put him in prison. After some days he was again brought into court and asked if he would worship the gods, but he refused. "I fear the Almighty God who made me," he replied, "and I serve Him only. You have my body in your power for a while, but not my soul." The judge condemned him to be beheaded. As he was led out of the gate of the city, his mother called aloud to him from the wall, "My son! Symphorian, my son! Think of the living God. Be steadfast. It is no loss of your life to-day, but a change for the better."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ruinart, p. 68.

## CHAPTER IV

### CARPUS, CAECILIA, AND APOLLONIUS

AFTER so sublime a narrative as that of the churches of Lyons and Vienne, other records may well appear tame and dull. But there is a noble simplicity about the acts of some martyrs who were put to death about the same date at Pergamos, the native town of Attalus—the place where, in St. John's days, the seat of Satan was, and where Antipas had suffered. Their names were Carpus and Papyrus. The proconsul of the province was on a visit to Pergamos, and the two were brought before him. "What are you called?" he said to Carpus. "My first and choicest name," he answered, "is a Christian; but if you ask me my secular name, it is Carpus." The proconsul said, "Of course you know the commands of the emperors to the effect that you must worship the gods who govern all things; so I recommend you to draw near and sacrifice." "I am a Christian," said Carpus: "I worship Christ, the Son of God, who came in the latter times for our salvation, and delivered us from the deceit of the devil; but to such idols as these I do not sacrifice. Do what you please; it is impossible for me to sacrifice to false and unreal devils, for those who sacrifice to them are like them. For as the true worshippers according to the divine instruction of the Lord, those who worship God in spirit and in truth, become like to the glory of God and are with

Him immortal, sharing eternal life through the Word, so those who serve these become like the devils in their unreality, and are with them destroyed in hell. For just vengeance is taken of him who deceived man, the noblest creature of God,—I mean the devil, who by his own wickedness stirs men up to this. So know, proconsul, that I do not sacrifice to these.” The proconsul in anger answered and said to the two men, “Sacrifice to the gods, and be fools no longer.” Carpus smiled and said, in the words of Jeremiah, “The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish.” “You must sacrifice,” said the proconsul; “the emperor has commanded it.” Carpus replied, “The living do not sacrifice to the dead.” “Do you think that the gods are dead?” said the magistrate. Carpus answered, “Do you wish to be told? These gods were never even live men that they should die. Do you wish to learn that this is true? Deprive them of the honour which you think to offer to them, and you will know that they are nothing. They are but earthly material, and in time they perish. Our God is above time. He made the ages. He Himself abides immortal and eternal, the same for ever, without increase or decrease; but these gods are made by men, and, as I said, are destroyed by time. Do not wonder that they utter oracles and deceive, for the devil, who fell of old from his glorious estate, in his own wickedness seeks to frustrate the fatherly love of God to man, and being hard pressed by the saints, he fights against them, and prepares war against them, and foretells the same to his own, and in like manner arguing from the things which happen to us day by day, being more ancient than we in length of existence, his experience teaches



him to predict the future mischief which he means to do. For by his denial of God he has gained a knowledge of unrighteousness, and God allows him to tempt man, and to seek to draw him away from godliness. Believe me therefore, sir, that your position is a very false one." The proconsul answered, "By letting you go on talking nonsense I have led you to speak blasphemy against the gods and the emperors; so to put a stop to it I ask whether you will sacrifice or not." "It is impossible that I should sacrifice," replied Carpus. "I have never yet sacrificed to idols." So the proconsul ordered him to be hung up and scraped, to which he replied by crying aloud repeatedly, "I am a Christian." After enduring this torture for some time, he became exhausted and could speak no more.

The proconsul turned his attention to Papyrus and asked him if he was a senator. He answered, "I am a citizen." "Of what city?" asked the magistrate. "Of Thyatira," he replied. "Have you any children?" said the magistrate. "Yes, many, by God's mercy," answered Papyrus. Hereupon one of the multitude who stood by cried out, "That is the Christian way of speaking. He means that he has children according to the faith." The proconsul said, "Why did you tell me a lie and say that you had children?" Papyrus answered, "Do you wish to be shown that I speak the truth and not a lie? I have children according to God in every province and city." The proconsul grew impatient and said, "Will you sacrifice, or will you not?" Papyrus answered, "From my youth up I have served God, and have never sacrificed to idols. I am a Christian, and you will get no other answer from me, for there is nothing greater or nobler that I could say."



So Papyrus also was hung up and scraped. Three separate pairs of executioners were employed upon him, but he uttered not a sound, receiving their cruel handling in silence. When the proconsul saw the great fortitude of these men, he ordered them to be burnt alive. They came down from the position in which they had been tortured, and "went with alacrity to the amphitheatre that they might be quickly delivered from the world." Papyrus was first nailed to the stake and set upright. The fire was lighted, and after praying quietly he expired.

When Carpus was nailed up, he smiled. The bystanders in astonishment said to him, "What made you laugh?" He answered, "I saw the glory of the Lord and was glad; and besides I am delivered from you and have no part in your wrongdoings." When the soldiers heaped the wood about him and began to light it, Carpus spoke from his cross and said, "We, too, are the children of the same mother, Eve, and have the same flesh as you, but when we look to the true judgment seat we can endure everything." The fire began to burn up, and Carpus prayed, "Blessed art Thou, Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, because Thou hast vouchsafed to give even to me, the sinner, this part with Thee," and when he had said this he breathed his last.

Standing near him at the moment was a Christian woman named Agathonice, who felt the infection of the martyr's enthusiasm. She saw, it is said, the glory of the Lord which Carpus said that he had seen, and felt that she was bidden to the joys of heaven. She raised her voice and cried, "That dinner is prepared for me; I must eat and partake of the glorious dinner." There are evident omissions in this part of the story, and we

must suppose that Agathonice was then arrested and sentenced by the magistrate. She had a young son with her, and the crowd endeavoured to work upon her maternal feelings. "Have pity upon your child," they cried; but she answered, "He has God who can have pity on him, for His providence takes care for all. I must do what I am here for." She took off her upper garments, and joyfully laid herself out upon the cross or stake to which she was to be fastened, while the spectators lamented for her and condemned the regulations under which such sentences were possible. When the stake was lifted into its place, and Agathonice felt the first touch of the flame, her spiritual exaltation gave place to a more natural human weakness. Once, twice, and thrice, it was counted that she exclaimed, "Lord! Lord! Lord! help me, for I have fled to Thee for refuge." Thus she gave up the ghost, and was perfected with the saints.<sup>1</sup>

It was towards the close of the reign of Marcus Aurelius that a famous saint was put to death at Rome, whose history has become so overgrown with legend that it is not easy to make sure what is fact and what is fiction. But there is nothing improbable in the following account of St. Caecilia. She was a daughter of the illustrious Roman family of the Caecilii, and had been brought up a Christian from her infancy. Her young husband Valerian, and his brother Tiburtius, were both induced by Caecilia to receive instruction from an "elder" named Urban, who lived on the family property along the Appian Way, and were baptized by him. At a time when some Christians were put to death by the prefect of the city, and, according to the usage of the time, were not allowed to be buried, the

<sup>1</sup> Harnack's *Texte und Untersuchungen*, Bd. III., Hft. 4.

two brothers made themselves conspicuous by their efforts to secure reverent burial for the martyrs. It led to their arrest. Tiburtius was brought before the prefect, who expostulated with him for attaching himself to a superstitious sect, unworthy of a man of his birth and standing. The answers which he gave led the prefect to say that he spoke like one who had no possession of his faculties. "No," answered Tiburtius, "the Lord Jesus Christ, whom I have received into my inmost parts, has possession of them, and speaks by me." When Valerian was placed at the bar, the prefect told him that his brother was mad, but that he expected good sense from Valerian. Valerian replied that he knew of only one physician for the mind, who was Christ, the Son of God. He said that eternal sorrow awaited those who lived the life of the world. "What?" cried the prefect; "shall we and the invincible emperors have eternal sorrow, while you have perpetual joy?" Valerian answered, "What are you and what are your emperors but frail men, who are born and must die when your time comes, and are responsible to God for the measure of power which you have received from Him?" The prefect said, "We are wasting time in irrelevant conversation. Offer to the gods, and you may go without further trouble." The brothers answered, "We do not sacrifice to the gods; we sacrifice every day to God." He inquired the name of their God. Valerian replied, "You will not find the name of God; not if you were to soar with wings." "Is not Jupiter the name of a god?" said the prefect. "No," said Valerian, in the language used by most of the Christian Apologists of his time, "it is the name of a corrupt and wicked man. Your own writers show him to be a murderer and a criminal."

The prefect ordered them to be beaten with sticks, —the punishment prescribed by Marcus Aurelius for the Roman citizens at Lyons. When Valerian was stripped he cried out that he had long wished for that hour. While the beating proceeded, a crier proclaimed aloud, "Do not blaspheme the gods and goddesses." But Valerian shouted to the Christian bystanders, possessed, like him, of the coveted franchise, "Citizens of Rome, do not let my sufferings frighten you away from the truth, but stand firm in the faith of our holy Lord, knowing that those who worship the gods of wood and stone will suffer everlasting tribulation." As the prefect showed some signs of unwillingness to proceed at once to extremities, wishing probably to give the prisoners an opportunity for reconsidering their position, his assessor urged him to allow no delay. The only use that they would make of the time, he said, would be to give away all their property (which legally was confiscated), and so there would be nothing left when they came to be executed. Upon this, the prefect ordered them to be led out to a spot called Pagus Triopius, four miles from the city, and there, after a last option of offering incense at the temple of Jupiter, to be beheaded. They refused to offer the incense, and knelt down and received the sword. It is said that the head official of the court, a man named Maximus, was so moved by the behaviour of the brothers as to attach himself to their religion, and to suffer death for it. The three bodies were buried by Caecilia in the neighbouring cemetery of Praetextatus, with which her family was connected.

Perhaps for her share in the burial, Caecilia was herself arrested and brought before the prefect. To the usual question about her position in life, she

answered with truth that she was freeborn and of noble family. The prefect taxed her with presuming upon her position, and being proud. "Pride," she answered, "is one thing, and firmness is another. I spoke firmly, but not proudly." "You know," he said, "that the emperors have commanded that those who will not deny that they are Christians shall be punished, and those who deny are to be set at liberty." Then, referring to an ordinance of Hadrian, he added, "Those who have accused you of being a Christian are present in court; if you say that you are not, their punishment will be speedy." But the noble lady scorned to deny her faith. Like her husband she expressed herself freely on the vanity of idols. The prefect interrupted her. "I have borne like a philosopher the insults which you have poured upon me; but I cannot allow you to pour them upon the gods." He ordered her to be taken back to her own house, and suffocated in the hot bath. The attempt was unsuccessful, and an executioner was sent to behead her there. He did his work so badly that Caecilia still lived for some time longer, making use of the time to arrange for the conveyance of her mansion to a friend, who dedicated it to the use of the church, and the basilica of St. Caecilia in the Trastevere stands on the site of it.<sup>1</sup>

The church of North Africa began to contribute its contingent to the noble army immediately after the death of Marcus Aurelius, when his unworthy son, Commodus, had succeeded him. "The first to draw the sword" against the Christians in Africa, according to Tertullian, was a proconsul named Vigellius Saturninus, appointed, doubtless, by Marcus himself; Vigellius,

<sup>1</sup> *Acta Sanctorum*, May 14; Surius, November 22.



according to the same writer, paid for it by the judgment of God which deprived him of his eyesight. The premier martyr of the province bore the Punic name of Namphamo; his companions were called Miggin and Lucitas, and a woman, Samae. St. Augustine is indignant with a heathen correspondent who mocked at the uncouth names. Among the Christians, those names were held in high honour; but the story of their lives and deaths has long been lost.

Within a month or two, however, a fresh batch of martyrs was called to appear before Saturninus at Carthage. It was composed of seven men and five women. They are known as the Scillitan martyrs, from the town at which they lived, the name of which is variously given as Scillis, or Scillium, or Scillita. We still have the brief but interesting notes of their trial.

"You can obtain the pardon of our lord the emperor," said Saturninus, "if you return to a right mind." Speratus, the leader of the band, answered, "We have never done any crime, nor abetted wrongdoing; we have never cursed any one, but when abused we have given thanks. This comes of obeying our own Emperor." He meant Christ. The proconsul felt that the Christian was implicitly claiming a religious superiority over him. "We too are religious," he answered, "and our religion is a simple one, and we swear by the genius of our lord the emperor and pray for his safety. You ought to do the same." "If you will listen quietly to me," said Speratus, "I will tell you the very secret of simplicity." "I shall not listen," replied Saturninus, who perhaps knew by experience what to expect, "if you begin to speak evil of our rites. Swear by the genius of the



emperor." Speratus answered—and it can hardly be wondered at if such utterances sounded disloyal to those who did not know their meaning—"I know nothing of any empire of this world. I serve that God whom no man hath seen nor can see with these eyes. I have committed no theft. I pay the duty on all that I buy. That is because I acknowledge my Lord, the King of kings and Emperor of all nations." The proconsul, addressing all the party, said, "For-sake this persuasion." Speratus, referring to the popular calumnies against the Christians, retorted, "It is a bad persuasion which bears false witness."

Saturninus took no notice of the retort, but continued to urge the prisoners to adopt what he considered the wise line. One of them, named Cittinus, answered, "We have no one else to fear but our Lord God in heaven." "Honour to Cæsar, as Cæsar," added one of the women, named Donata; "but fear to God alone." "I am a Christian," said another woman. "What I am," said a third, "I mean to be." Saturninus turned again to Speratus. "Do you persist in being a Christian?" He answered, "I am a Christian;" and the rest joined in his confession. "Would you like time to think?" asked the governor. "In such a straightforward matter," answered Speratus, "there is no need to think." "What stuff have you got on your book-shelves," was the sudden question which followed. "The books and epistles of the righteous Paul," Speratus answered. "You shall be remanded for thirty days," said Saturninus, "and recollect yourselves." Speratus answered once more, "I am a Christian." So said they all. Then, reading from the judicial tablet, the proconsul uttered his sentence, "Speratus, Nartzalus, Cittinus, Donata, Vestia, Secunda,

and the rest, having confessed that they live in the Christian manner, and having had the offer of returning to the Roman way, and having obstinately refused, I pronounce that they be punished with the sword." "We thank God," said Speratus. "To-day we are martyrs in heaven," cried Nartzalus; "thanks be to God."<sup>1</sup>

Christianity had made much progress among the upper classes at Rome by the end of Marcus' reign, in spite of that emperor's opposition. Amongst its most notable professors of that date was one named Apollonius, who appears to have held the high position of a member of the Roman senate. He was renowned amongst the Christians for his philosophical culture. This man was denounced to the authorities, near the beginning of the reign of Commodus, and brought to trial. The narrative of Apollonius' defence and martyrdom has lately been found, both in Greek and in Armenian, and is as follows.

By order of the Prefect of the Praetorium, whose name was Perennis—though the Armenian version of the Acts calls him Terentius, which may be intended for Tarruntenus, the predecessor of Perennis—Apollonius was brought before the high tribunal of his peers in senate. He was asked why he refused to sacrifice to the gods, and boldly replied, "Because I am a Christian." Perennis bade him repent, and swear by the fortune of the emperor. Apollonius replied, as Polycarp had done before him, that it was an ungodly thing to repent of what was good, and that he was firmly resolved to keep the commandments of Christ. He added that he disapproved of oaths as being an outcome of falsehood. "Yet," he said, "I am willing

<sup>1</sup> Robinson's *Texts and Studies*, vol. i. no. 2.

to swear by the true and eternal God, whom the hands of men did not make, but who makes man to rule over men, that we too honour the emperor, and pray for him." The session was probably held in the temple of Apollo on the Palatine. The prefect invited his prisoner to sacrifice to Apollo and the other gods, and to the image of the emperor. "No," said Apollonius; "I and all Christians offer a pure and unbloody sacrifice of prayers to God, on behalf of those living images whom His providence has appointed to rule over the earth. The emperor Commodus holds his sovereignty by the will of God, the only Sovereign, who holds all things in His hand." Perennis said, "I give you a day's respite to consider your interests and to take counsel for your life." So Apollonius was taken to prison.

On his second appearance he was asked what resolution he had come to. He answered, "To remain firm in my religion, as I said before." Perennis reminded him of a decree of the senate, by which, for some reason, the imperial law had been reinforced, under which his life was forfeited unless he sacrificed. But Apollonius remained firm. He knew his duty to God, he said, and could offer no worship to the idols made with hands, fashioned of gold and silver and wood, which neither see nor hear. His worship was reserved for God, who breathed the breath of life into men, and who continually sustains it. To worship idols would be to debase himself—to put himself in subjection to things less than human. Like the other learned Apologists of the time, he showed the follies of idolatry—how the Egyptians worshipped an onion, a basin, a fish, a dove, a crocodile; and the Athenians a copper ox-head, which they identified with the fortune of

Athens, and set it up in a conspicuous place beside the effigies of Zeus and Heracles. Even Socrates, he said, had poured contempt upon the religion of Athens, when, instead of swearing by their gods, he swore by the plane-tree, or by the dog.

Such reasoning appeared to the practical mind of the prefect of the Praetorium to be beside the point. "You have given us enough philosophy," he said—"admirable philosophy; but the senate has forbidden Christianity." "Yes," said Apollonius, "but a decree of the senate cannot prevail over the decree of God." Death, he said, was appointed for all; and Christians practised themselves for it in dying daily. So far were the heathen calumnies against Christianity from being true, that Christians would not allow themselves a single impure glance, nor listen to a bad word. He said that it was no worse to die for the true God than to die of fever, or dysentery, or any other disease. "Are you then bent upon death?" asked Perennis. "No," said Apollonius, "I enjoy life; but love of life does not make me afraid to die. There is nothing better than life—the life eternal, which gives immortality to the soul which has lived well here." The prefect confessed that he did not understand. "I am heartily sorry for you," said the prisoner; "so insensible as you are to the beauties of grace. Only the seeing heart can appreciate the word of God, as the seeing eye the light."

Here a brother philosopher, of the Cynic school, interrupted Apollonius, and said that such language was an insult to the understanding, though Apollonius himself thought that he was uttering profound truths. "I have learned to pray, and not to insult," Apollonius answered; "only to the senseless does the truth appear

to be an insult." The judge besought him to explain himself clearly. Then Apollonius answered with what Eusebius justly calls a most eloquent defence of his faith. "The Word of God," he said, "who brought into existence men's souls and bodies, became man in Judæa—our Saviour Jesus Christ. Perfectly righteous, and filled with Divine wisdom, He lovingly taught us what the God of all is like, and what is the end of virtue, befitting the souls of men, with a view to social order and dignity. By His own suffering He put a stop to sins in their very beginning. He taught us to stop anger, to moderate desire, to chastise the love of pleasure. He taught us to relieve sorrow, to be generous, to promote charity, to put away vainglory, to abstain from taking revenge, to despise death—not when inflicted for wrongdoing, but in patient endurance of the wrongdoing of others. He taught us to obey the law laid down by Himself, to honour the king, to worship the immortal God, and Him only, to believe our souls to be immortal, to look forward to judgment after death, to expect the reward of the toils of virtue to be given by God after the resurrection to those who have lived good lives. All this He taught us plainly, and gave us convincing reasons for it; and won great glory for His excellence. But He incurred the envy of the unnurtured, like the righteous men and philosophers before Him. For the righteous are unserviceable to the unrighteous; as the fools unjustly say in a certain proverb"—here Apollonius refers to a passage in the Book of Wisdom—"‘Let us lie in wait for the righteous, because he is not for our turn.’ And not only so, but it was said by one of the Greeks"—a speaker in the *Republic* of Plato—"‘The righteous man shall be scourged, tortured, bound, have his eyes



put out, and at last be crucified.' As the Athenian sycophants persuaded the multitude, and unjustly sentenced Socrates, so our Master and Saviour was sentenced to death by some of the wicked, who reproached Him as they had reproached the prophets before Him—those prophets who foretold many glorious things of the Man, that such an one would come, perfectly just and virtuous, and should do good to all men, and should persuade them by His goodness to worship the God of all. We," he concluded, "have hastened to honour Him, because we have learned from Him lofty commandments, of which we were ignorant before, and are under no delusion. Yet if it were a delusion, as you say, which tells us that the soul is immortal, and that there is a judgment after death, and a reward of virtue at the resurrection, and that God is the Judge, we would gladly be carried away by such a lie as that, which has taught us to live good lives, awaiting the hope of the future, even while suffering adversities."

The magistrate listened respectfully to the address which he had invited, but it woke in him no doubt with regard to the course which he was to pursue. "I thought," he said, "that you would have changed your mind, and would have worshipped the gods with us." "And I, sir," Apollonius replied, "hoped that good thoughts would have come to you, and that the eyes of your soul would have been opened by my defence, so that your heart might bear fruit in worshipping God the Creator, and daily offering to Him alone, with almsgiving and kindness towards men, the prayers which are an unbloody sacrifice, pure before God." Perennis was touched but not moved. "I wish that I could let you go," he said; "but I am forbidden by the decree of the emperor Commodus. Nevertheless



I will use you kindly in death." The kindness took the heathenish form of ordering the informer, who was probably a slave of Apollonius, to have his legs broken. Apollonius was led away to be beheaded, glorifying God as he went.<sup>1</sup>

There are evident signs in the story of Apollonius that the officials who had to deal with him would have been glad to be rid of the business. The emperor seems to have thrown the responsibility upon his prefect, the prefect upon the senate. It was the policy of the moment to discourage prosecutions for Christianity. That was doubtless the reason why the informer against Apollonius was punished, although his information was true. Probably there were, indeed, proconsuls and magistrates who threw themselves into the work of persecution with ardour, both to gain favour with a master like Marcus Aurelius, and also because it suited their own disposition. Such an one seems to have been the governor at Lyons during the great persecution. But there were others who detested the work, and avoided it to the utmost of their power. Tertullian tells of one, Cincius Severus, who suggested to the Christians at Thysdrus, in Africa, safe answers that they might make, so that he might let them go. Another, Vespronius Candidus, when a Christian was brought before him who had friends in the town, treated the case as one of turbulent behaviour, and gave the man his liberty. Another, called Asper, gave the Christian a little pain, and at once turned him down without compelling him to sacrifice, frankly avowing amongst the advocates and counsellors of the court that he was sorry to have meddled with the case at all. One Pudens,

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* v. 21 ; Von Gebhardt's *Ausgewählte Märtyreracten*, p. 44 ; and Conybeare's *Monuments of Early Christianity*, p. 35.

when he learned from the indictment handed in to him that the Christian at the bar had been the victim of a kind of blackmail, tore up the indictment and let the man go, affirming that he would not break the law by hearing the case without a proper accuser.

## CHAPTER V

### PERPETUA

THE number of the Christians to be dealt with, which had proved a difficulty in Bithynia as early as the time of Pliny and Trajan, proved a greater and yet greater difficulty towards the end of the second century. Only a resolute government was capable of coping with it, and the government of Commodus was not of that character. Besides, Commodus, early in his reign, fell into the hands of a favourite, who, although probably no Christian herself, had yet been brought up by a Christian priest, and was well disposed towards the Christians. Her name was Marcia. No laws or regulations under which Christians suffered were repealed ; but there was a growing tendency on the part of magistrates under Commodus to be lenient, and to use the mildest forms of penalty which were available. Among other substitutes for capital punishment recognised by the Roman law was that of condemnation to work in the mines, in a kind of state slavery. This came to be a favourite penalty for the Christians. An illustration is offered in the history of one who became Bishop of Rome, as related by a bitter opponent. Callistus, who gives his name to the famous catacomb of St. Callistus, was the slave of a wealthy Christian, and brought himself into grave trouble by questionable conduct. Some Jews, whom he had irritated, accused him before Fuscianus, the prefect of the city ; but,

perhaps deterred by the fate of the accuser of Apollonius, they did not venture to accuse him directly of being a Christian, but of having disturbed their synagogue, which was under the protection of the law. Fuscianus sent him to the living death of penal servitude in the mines of the unhealthy island of Sardinia, where he found himself in company with many other Christian sufferers. Fortunately for him, Marcia soon after felt herself impelled to do some good deed. She sent for Victor, the Bishop of Rome, and asked him for the list of the "martyrs" in Sardinia. He gave her one, which happened not to include the name of Callistus, and she obtained from Commodus a free pardon for them all. Marcia committed the pardon into the hands of the priest who had brought her up, who on arriving in Sardinia, and finding that the name of Callistus had been omitted, took upon him to add that name, and brought all the prisoners away.<sup>1</sup>

But the clemency of the careless Commodus made no change in the legal situation of Christians, and under Septimius Severus, who succeeded to the empire in the year 193, the Church found again what it was to have a strong ruler's hand turned against her. Not that Severus was from the outset harsh towards the Christians; on the contrary, he treated them with a certain degree of favour. He had Christians about his person and family, of whose religion he cannot have been in doubt. He is even said to have ascribed his recovery from a severe illness to the prayers and unction of a Christian. When he conquered the town of Byzantium, which was held against him in the interests of his rival Niger, the officer in command of the city was heard to exclaim, "This is good news for the

<sup>1</sup> Hippolytus, *Adv. Haer.* ix. 12.

Christians." On his entry into Rome after his victory over Albinus, when great numbers of distinguished persons were put to death, Severus is said to have protected certain eminent men and women, whom he knew to be Christians, and, in spite of the anger of the populace, paid them a high public tribute.

But even at the outset of his reign, trouble with the Christians was unavoidable. In Africa especially, where zeal ran naturally into fanaticism, Christians themselves grew impatient of "the good, long peace."<sup>1</sup> A Christian soldier refused, on grounds which his fellow Christians thought extravagant, to wear a simple wreath of laurel when receiving a largess from the emperor. Tertullian applauded the refusal. He affirmed that it was impossible for a soldier to be a Christian ; that it was serving two masters. The bishops who took an opposite line were, he said, lions in time of peace, but deer in time of battle. The prisons began to fill once more with "martyrs designate," as Tertullian called them. He addressed to them his ringing exhortations.

Nor was it only upon the sufferers themselves that the eloquence of Tertullian was expended. Two works in defence of their religion came from his pen in quick succession,—one addressed to "the Nations," that is, the heathen, in general ; the other, addressed more particularly to the magistrates whose business it was to administer the law. The one thing of which Tertullian complained was, that Christianity was condemned without being heard. In the trial of all other criminals, the case was gone into, the accusation proved or disproved, witnesses heard, the character of the crime exposed, defence admitted : Christians alone were con-

<sup>1</sup> Tertullian, *De Corona Militis*, 1.



demned on the mere avowal of Christianity. It was all "the battle of a name." Whereas in all other cases the magistrates in the law courts endeavoured to persuade criminals to confess their crime, with the Christians, on the contrary, they used every torture that they could devise to induce them to deny. "I am a Christian," the man would say ; and they redoubled their efforts to make him say that he was not. "They believe about us," he cried, "what is never proved ; and they will not have the question tried out, for fear Christians should be proved not to be what they like better to believe that they are." It was all prejudice. "A good man, Gaius Seius, but that he is a Christian." "Extraordinary that a respectable person like Lucius Titius should suddenly turn Christian." That was the way men spoke. The only argument was, "Christianity is not allowed." "If the Tiber rises to the walls, if the Nile refuses to rise into the fields, if the heaven is stayed, if the earth is moved, if there comes a famine or a plague, the cry is immediately, 'The Christians to the lion.'"

The current calumnies against Christianity were brilliantly exposed, and the war was carried into the enemy's country ; but Tertullian, like Justin before him, was not content with a merely negative defence. He dared to set before the magistrates the inmost secrets of the Christian religion, the history and the nature of Christ, the mystery of the Blessed Trinity. He drew his picture of the Christian Church at prayer,—and praying for the emperor, to whom they were considered disloyal :

"For all emperors we Christians continually pray, looking up to God above with hands outspread, because they are innocent, with head uncovered, because we

have nothing to be ashamed of, without a prompter, because our prayers are from the heart. Long life, security for their empire, safety for their homes, brave armies, a loyal senate, a moral people, a peaceful world, all that a man and a Cæsar can desire, all these I pray for on their behalf, and to none other but Him, from whom I am sure of gaining them, because it is He alone who gives them, and it is I who have a right to be heard by Him—His servant, who alone worship Him, who am killed for my duty to Him, who offer to Him the rich and more excellent sacrifice which He has Himself commanded, prayer out of a pure heart and an innocent soul, and proceeding from a Holy Spirit. When we are thus spreading forth our hands to God, let us be torn open with hooks, hung upon crosses, licked by the flames, have our throats cut with swords, be assailed by wild beasts; the very posture of the Christian at prayer makes him ready for any punishment. See to it, worthy magistrates; draw forth with tortures the soul that is thus pleading for the emperor with God.”<sup>1</sup>

The Roman state was jealous of the growth of what were called *factiones*, or associations. Tertullian explains the reason why that jealousy was wise. Its object was to secure public morality and the unity of the commonwealth.

“We,” he cries, “constitute a body, based upon a common religion, an agreement in practice, a bond of hope. We meet and form an assembly, in order that our prayers may come up to God like an armed band and give Him no peace. This is a violence which God loves. . . . We meet for the rehearsal of the Divine writings, according as the circumstances of the moment

<sup>1</sup> Tertullian, *Apol.* 30.

require warning for the future or recollection of the past. With these holy words we feed faith, encourage hope, confirm confidence, and at the same time strengthen discipline by the enforcement of what is commanded. There also are delivered exhortations, reproofs, and religious censures. . . . The presidents are tried elders. . . . Every one makes a small contribution to a kind of fund, once a month, or when he pleases, and if he pleases, and if he can ; for no one is compelled to give ; it is purely voluntary. It makes a sort of bank of piety. No banquetings, or drinking bouts, or gorgings, whether men will or no, are paid for out of it, but the feeding and burying of the poor, the support of children who have neither parents nor means of subsistence, of old people who cannot go out to work, of shipwrecked sailors, and of those who for the sake of God and of their religion have been thrown into mines or prisons, and so are cast upon their religion for support. Yet even a work of charity like this is turned by some into an accusation against us. ‘See,’ they say, ‘how fond they are of one another ! . . . how ready they are to die instead of each other !’ ”<sup>1</sup>

The expostulations of Tertullian fell upon deaf ears, if his attacks upon the Pagan religion did not provoke displeasure. After nine years of empire, Severus took his first active measures against Christianity. In the year 202 he ordered that no one should be allowed to become a proselyte to Judaism, and applied the same provision to the Christians. It was, perhaps, an illogical edict, so far as regards the Christians, when it was a defiance of the law for anybody to be a Christian at all ; but it shows how firm a position the Christians

<sup>1</sup> Tertullian, *Apol.* 39.

had gained under the laxity of Commodus, and how Severus himself shrank from returning at once to the strictness of Marcus. It was not long before he passed—or governors under him who felt sure of not incurring rebuke—to the severest measures of repression.

The two spheres in which the persecution was most acutely felt were Egypt and proconsular Africa. An Egyptian writer of that date, commenting upon the “seventy weeks” of Daniel, made them end with the tenth year of Severus, which seemed to him to be the beginning of the coming of Antichrist. Clement of Alexandria, who was then in full activity as a teacher in that city, speaks of “inexhaustible well-springs of martyrs,” who every day before his eyes were roasted alive, and impaled, and beheaded. The persecution drove him into Cappadocia; but although he was personally unmolested there, he did not wholly escape from the horror of its effects upon others. His friend Alexander, afterwards Bishop of Jerusalem, with whom he had taken refuge, was thrown into prison. The governor of Cappadocia, Herminianus, was exasperated by the conversion of his own wife to Christianity, and took his revenge by treating her fellow Christians harshly. A horrible illness befell him, and he is reported to have said, “Let no one know of it, or the Christians will be glad.” He succeeded in persuading several Christians, under torture, to abjure their faith; but afterwards, so it is said, was sorry for what he had done, and died under serious conviction.

The governor of Egypt, whose headquarters were at Alexandria, was a man of the name of Laetus. He did not shrink from shedding blood. Among the most noteworthy victims at the outset of the persecution was a man named Leonides, who was beheaded,

leaving a widow and seven children. The eldest of the children, who was then sixteen years of age, was destined to be one of the most illustrious Christian teachers of all time. His name was Origen. Long before his father's death the young Origen had been consumed with Christian devotion and eagerness for scriptural studies. Sometimes when the boy was asleep his father would uncover his breast and reverently kiss the shrine in which the Holy Ghost was lodged. When Leonides was cast into prison, Origen, in his burning desire for martyrdom, would certainly have shared his fate if it had not been for his mother's devices. At first she prevailed upon him to refrain from throwing himself upon death because she needed his support. His excitement, however, grew so great that at length she was compelled to lock up his clothes. When there was nothing more that he could do, Origen, unable to be idle, sent a letter to his father in prison earnestly exhorting him to remain firm. "Be sure," he wrote, "that no thought for us makes you change your mind." The thought of his family might well weigh with the father, for all his property was confiscated to the state, as was the case with all who suffered capital punishment, so that the wife and children were left in great necessity.<sup>1</sup>

Young as he was, Origen began to support himself by teaching, and before he had completed his eighteenth year he was placed at the head of the Catechetical School of Alexandria in succession to the famous Clement, who had been driven elsewhere by the persecution. His disciples in that school were largely heathens, but by the teaching of their young master many of them became Christians and ended their

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* vi. 2.



lives nobly as martyrs. The first of these was a man named Plutarch, whose younger brother Heraclas, a convert of Origen's like himself, became afterwards Bishop of Alexandria. Origen accompanied him to the place of execution and barely escaped death at the hands of Plutarch's fellow-citizens, with whom Plutarch was very popular and who held Origen responsible for his death. Another named Serenus proved his faith in the fire. A third martyr disciple of Origen's was Heraclides, who was beheaded while still in preparation for baptism. A fourth was one newly baptized of the name of Heron. A fifth also bore the name of Serenus, who was beheaded after enduring a succession of dreadful tortures. Women as well as men were learners in the Catechetical School, and one of these, named Herais, while still under preparation for baptism, received, as Origen expressed it, "the baptism of fire."<sup>1</sup>

One of the most celebrated Egyptian martyrs of the time was a lady of the name of Potamiaena. Potamiaena was a maiden of great personal beauty who had devoted herself to a life of virginity. On being brought to trial for her faith she was subjected to the usual tortures, and at last burnt to death along with her mother, Marcella. The story went in Eusebius' time—though he does not vouch for its truth—that the magistrate, whose name was Aquila, finding her inflexible under torture, at last threatened to give her over to the gladiators to do what they liked with her. The maiden considered for a while, and then being asked what her decision was she made a reply which was held to constitute sacrilege. She was immediately sentenced to death and committed to a

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* vi. 3, 4.

soldier named Basilides to be led to execution. The multitude closed round her and assailed her with coarse language, but Basilides drove them away and kept them at a distance, treating his prisoner with the greatest consideration and humanity. She on her part gratefully bade the sympathetic warder be of good courage, for she told him that when she was gone she would pray for him to her own Lord, and that He would speedily reward him for what he had done for her. The mode of her execution was to have boiling pitch poured over her limbs, beginning at the feet, and so by degrees up to the head. According to another version of the story, she was condemned to be dropped into the pitch, and cried aloud to the judge, "I adjure you, by the head of the emperor whom you fear, if you have determined to punish me that way, do not make them strip me, but let me be gradually let down into the pitch, that you may see what power of endurance is given me by that Christ whom you know not." Not long after her death, Basilides on some occasion was required by his fellow-soldiers to take an oath. He replied that he was not allowed to swear, for he was a Christian. At first they thought that he was jesting, but as he adhered to his statement he was brought before the judge, made the same confession, and was imprisoned. His brethren in Christ visited him, and asked him the reason of this sudden, strange determination. He told them that three days after the death of Potamiaena that martyr had visited him at night and set a garland on his head, saying that she had pleaded for him with the Lord, who had granted her request, and that before long he would be taken where she was. The brethren thereupon gave him "the seal" of baptism, and the

next day, after making a remarkable confession, he was beheaded.<sup>1</sup>

It may seem hard to us now to believe that such apparitions as that of Potamiaena to Basilides should be vouchsafed ; but Origen, her contemporary, speaks of them in a way which cannot be hastily set aside. After mentioning that visible traces of the presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church were still in his day to be found, in the expulsion of devils, in the effecting of miraculous cures, and in the foretelling of things to come, he adds, "And even if Celsus, or the Jew whom he introduces, should scoff at what I say, I will say it nevertheless, that many have come over to Christianity in spite of themselves, as it were, because some spirit has suddenly turned their minds from hating the word to dying for the sake of it, by appearing to them in sleep or dream. I have investigated many such cases ; but if I were to write what I have learned by direct personal intercourse with those to whom these things have happened, it would bring upon me the broad ridicule of the unbelievers, who would think that I was composing fictions. . . . But God is witness of our conscience, who wills . . . to commend the divine teaching of Jesus by a variety of unmistakable facts." <sup>2</sup>

No record of Christian suffering, whether in that age or in any other, surpasses, if it can equal, the record of the martyrdoms at Carthage under Septimius Severus. It has come down to us edited, in all probability, by the hand of Tertullian, who has had the good taste to leave the words of the martyrs in their native simplicity and unadorned. Tertullian by that time had joined the sect of the Montanists, one of whose main tenets was that the religion of the Holy

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* vi. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Origen, *c. Celsum*, i. 46.

Ghost was a progressive religion, and that the revelations of God were intended to become clearer and larger as time went on. He thought, and in this he thought rightly, that if ancient examples of Divine power were embodied in literature for the instruction of after times, the examples given in his own days were not less worthy of a similar embodiment. "Therefore," he says, "'What we have heard and seen . . . we declare unto you,' brethren and sons, that ye also who were present may remember the glory of God, and that ye who now learn the facts by our report 'may have fellowship' with the holy martyrs, and through them with our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom is glory and honour for ever and ever. Amen."

"Certain young persons who were catechumens," that is, under preparation for baptism, "were taken into custody. These were Revocatus and his fellow-slave Felicity, Saturninus and Secundulus. Among them was also a married lady, of good birth and liberal education, called Vibia Perpetua. She had a father and mother, and two brethren—one of them a catechumen like herself—and an infant son at her breast. She herself was of about two and twenty years of age." From this point on, the tale of her martyrdom is as Perpetua herself related it, leaving it in her own handwriting to express her own thoughts.

"While we were still," she writes, "at large, though closely guarded, and my father, in his deep affection for me, was anxious to upset me and endeavoured persistently to cast me down: 'Father,' said I, 'you see this vessel lying here?'—a pitcher it may have been, or some other kind of vessel. And he said, 'I do.' And I said to him, 'Can it be called by any other name than what it is?' And he said, 'No.' Then said I, 'In like manner neither

can I call myself anything else than what I am—that is, a Christian.’ Then my father, being stirred at that saying, flung himself upon me to pluck out my eyes ; but he only hurt me, and went away conquered with his hell-born arguments. Then for a few days I thanked God for being left without my father, and I was refreshed by his absence. Within the space of those few days we were baptized ; and the Spirit bade me ask for nothing else when I came from the water but for endurance in the flesh.

“After a few days we were taken into the gaol, and I was terrified, because I had never felt such darkness. Oh, that horrible day ! the heat overpowering because of the crowding ! the rough handling of the soldiers to get money ! Besides all this, I was worn out with anxiety for my babe there. Then Tertius and Pomponius, the blessed deacons who ministered to us, arranged for a price that we should be let out for a few hours’ space into a better part of the gaol, to refresh ourselves. Then all came out of the gaol and attended to their own wants. I gave suck to my babe, which was faint for want of food. In my anxiety for him I spoke to my mother, and I encouraged my brother, and commended my son to them. I began to be quite ill, because I saw that they were getting ill on my account. For many days I suffered such anxieties ; and then I took to having my babe to stay with me in the gaol, and at once I grew better, and was relieved from my trouble and anxiety for the child ; and the gaol became to me suddenly a palace, so that I liked better to be there than anywhere else.

“Then said my brother to me, ‘*Domina soror*, you are now in great favour—so high that you may ask for a vision, and it will be shown you, whether it is a



case of suffering or of release.' And I, knowing that I had communings with the Lord, for whose sake I had gone through so much, confidently promised him, saying, 'To-morrow I will tell you.' And I asked, and this vision was shown to me :

"I saw a brazen ladder of marvellous height, reaching right up to heaven, and so narrow that only one could climb it at a time ; and on the sides of the ladder were all manner of steel instruments fastened in. There were swords and spikes, and hooks and knives, so that if any one went up carelessly or without fixing his eyes above, he was cut and his flesh stuck upon the instruments. And there was under the ladder a dragon lying of marvellous size, which lay in wait for those that climbed, and frightened them that they might not climb. Now Saturus climbed first, he who afterwards gave himself up for us of his own accord, because it was he who had built us up, and at the moment when we were taken up he had not been present ; and he came to the top of the ladder, and turned and said to me, 'Perpetua, I am waiting for you, but take heed that the dragon do not bite you.' And I said, 'He will not hurt me in the name of Jesus Christ.' And from under the ladder he slowly threw up his head, as if he were afraid of me, and as if I were treading the first rung of the ladder, I trod upon his head. And I went up, and I saw an immense large garden, and in the midst a white-haired man sitting, in a shepherd's garb, tall, milking his ewes ; and standing around him were many thousands in white raiment. And he lifted up his head and beheld me, and said to me, 'Thou art well come, my child.' And he called me, and from the cheese made of the milk that he was milking he gave me as it were a morsel, and I received it with my

hands joined, and did eat ; and all that stood around said, Amen. And at the sound of their voice I awoke, still chewing in my mouth somewhat sweet. And immediately I told my brother, and we understood that we were to suffer ; and we began to have no more hope in this world.

“After a few days a rumour spread that our case was to be heard. Thereupon also came my father from the city, worn out with sorrow. And he came up to me to shake my purpose, saying, ‘O daughter, pity my grey hairs : pity your father, if I am worthy to be called your father. If by these hands I have reared you to this flower of your age ; if I have preferred you to all your brothers ; give me not over to the scorn of men. Look at your brethren, look at your mother and your aunt, look at your son, who cannot live when you are gone. Lay aside your proud resolve, and do not ruin us all ; for not one of us will be able to speak like a free man, if anything should happen to you.’ These things he said like a father, in his affection kissing my hands and casting himself at my feet, and with tears he began to call me no longer *filia* (daughter), but *domina* (lady). And I was grieved for my father’s calamity, because he was the only one of all my family that was not ready to rejoice in my passion ; and I comforted him, saying, ‘Upon that platform will be done what pleases God, for be sure we are not in our own power but in God’s.’ And he went back from me sadly disappointed.

“The next day, while we were at our morning meal, we were suddenly carried off to be tried, and came to the forum. Immediately the report ran through the quarters near the forum, and an immense crowd gathered. We went up upon the platform. The rest were examined and confessed.”

Perpetua does not give a detailed account of the examination ; but another account of it remains, which bears marks of being genuine. Saturus was the first to be invited to sacrifice. He replied that it was right to sacrifice to God, and not to idols. "Do you speak for yourself," asked the governor, "or for all?" "For all," he replied; "we all have one mind." To this the rest assented. The women were then removed, and Hilarian the magistrate endeavoured in succession to induce Saturus, Saturninus, and Revocatus to sacrifice, but without success. "Do not set yourself up to be better than our sovereigns," he said to the first. "I do think," said Saturus, "that I shall stand better with the true Sovereign of this world and the next, if only I am enabled to strive and to suffer." The threat of death only made Revocatus exclaim, "We pray God that we may be permitted to be slain." Hilarian then called in the two women. He asked Felicity whether she was married. She replied that she was, but that she could pay no regard to her husband now. "Where is he?" said Hilarian. "He is not here," she answered. "What is his position in life?" "A working man." "Have you father and mother?" "No; but Revocatus is my brother. I could have no better parents than these Christian friends." "Have pity on yourself, young woman, and live. I see that you are expecting the birth of a child." "I am a Christian, and I am bidden to disregard all other things for God's sake." "Think for yourself: I am sorry for you." "Do what you will; you will never persuade me."

Hilarian turned to Perpetua. "What do you say, Perpetua? will you sacrifice?" "I am a Christian," she answered, "and I mean to be true to my name of Perpetua." "Have you a father and mother?" "Yes,"

she replied. Her parents were present in court. "At last they came to me," so runs her own account, "and there on the spot appeared father, with my son, and dragged me down from the step, and said entreatingly, 'Pity your babe.' And Hilarian the procurator, who at that time had received the power of the sword in the stead of the proconsul Minucius Timinianus, who was dead, said likewise, 'Spare your father's hoary head ; spare your boy's tender age : do sacrifice for the health of the emperors.' And I answered, 'I will not do it.' Hilarian said, 'Are you a Christian ?' And I answered, 'I am a Christian.' And when my father persisted in trying to shake my purpose, Hilarian ordered him to be turned down, and some one hit him with a rod. And I was grieved at the calamity of my father, as though I had been hit myself ; so grieved was I for his unhappy old age. Then the procurator sentenced us one and all, and condemned us to the beasts ; and we came down to the gaol with mirth. Then because the babe had been wont to take the breast from me, and to stay with me in the gaol, I sent forthwith the deacon Pomponius to father, asking for the child ; but father would not give him ; and, as it has pleased God, neither does the child any longer desire the breasts, nor have they any more burned me ; so that I have not been tormented with anxiety for the child nor with pain in my breasts.

"A few days after, as we were all praying, suddenly in the midst of the prayer a voice burst from me, and I named Dinocrates : and I marvelled that he had never come into my mind till then, and I grieved when I remembered what had befallen him : and I felt at once that I was in a position to pray for him, and ought to do so. And I began to pray much for him,

and to make moaning to the Lord. Straightway that same night it was shown me on this wise: I saw Dinocrates coming out of a gloomy place, where there were many others besides, exceedingly hot and thirsty, with his countenance dirty and wan in colour, and the wound in his face which he had when he died. This Dinocrates had been my brother in the flesh, of seven years old, who had been ill and died a bad death with cancer in the face, so that his death was a horror to everybody." The reason why Perpetua had not prayed for her brother before was, no doubt, because he had died unbaptized, and the prayers of the Church for the departed were only offered on behalf of those who had died in the faith. "For him then I had prayed: and between him and me there was a great gulf fixed, so that neither of us could go to the other. Next, in the place where Dinocrates was, there was a tank full of water, with the brink too high for the boy's stature, and Dinocrates was stretching himself as if to drink. I was sad that the tank should hold water, and yet he should be unable to drink, because of the height of the brink of it. And I awoke, and understood that my brother was in trouble. But I was confident that I should be able to help his trouble, and I prayed for him every day until we went across to the prison at the barracks. For we were to fight at the sports belonging to the barracks. It was then the birthday of the Cæsar Geta: and I prayed for my brother day and night, groaning and weeping that he might be given to me.

"On the day when we remained in the stocks, it was shown me on this wise. I saw the place which I had seen before, and Dinocrates with his body cleansed, and well clad, taking his refreshment. And where the wound was, I saw the flesh closed up: and the tank



which I had seen before, I now saw with the brink lowered to the boy's waist ; and water ran over from it without ceasing ; and on the brink was a golden stoup full of water ; and Dinocrates went up and began to drink from it, and that stoup failed not to be full. And when he had had enough, he went away to play after the manner of children, rejoicing. And I awoke. Then I understood that he was removed from his punishment."

Perhaps it may be necessary to say that the place where Dinocrates was in punishment was not what is commonly known as purgatory. According to the belief of the time the unbaptized child had gone to hell itself, and the wonder was that Perpetua's prayer had power even to release from hell.

"Then, after a few days, the soldier Pudens, the centurion's adjutant, and superintendent of the gaol, who began to think much of us, understanding that there was a mighty power in us, allowed many to come in to us, that we and they might refresh ourselves together. Now as the day of the sports drew near, my father entered in to me, worn out with sorrow, and began to pluck out his beard, and to throw it on the ground, and to dash himself on his face, and to cry shame upon his years, and to say such words as might move all creation. I was very sorry for his unhappy old age.

"The day before we were to fight, I saw in a vision that Pomponius the deacon came hither to the door of the prison, and knocked violently, and I went out to him and opened to him : he was clothed in a white flowing garment, and had embroidered shoes on. And he said to me : 'Perpetua, we are waiting for you ; come along.' And he held me by the hand, and we

began to go through rough and crooked places. At last with difficulty we reached the amphitheatre, panting, and he led me into the middle of the arena, and said to me, 'Fear not, here am I with you and share your labour ;' and he disappeared. And I saw a vast crowd of people all in rapt attention. And because I knew that I was given to the beasts, I wondered that no beasts were sent in to me. And there came forth against me a certain Egyptian"—that is a negro—"hideous to see, with his helpers, to fight with me. There came to me also comely young men, to be my helpers and my backers. And I was stripped, and I was turned into a man ; and my backers began to rub me with oil as they do for an athletic contest : and I saw the Egyptian opposite me wallow himself in dust. And there came forth a man wonderfully tall, so tall that he was higher than the top of the amphitheatre, wearing a flowing tunic with purple across the midst of the bosom between the two stripes, having richly embroidered shoes made of gold and silver, and carrying a rod like a master of gladiators, and a green branch on which were golden apples. And he called for silence, and he said : ' If this Egyptian conquers this woman, he shall kill her with the sword : and if she conquers him, she shall have this branch.' And he departed. And we drew near to each other, and began to box. He wished to seize me by the feet, but I with my heels stamped upon his face ; and I was lifted up in the air, and began to stamp upon him as if I had not to tread upon the earth. But when I saw that it was taking a long time, I joined my hands together, putting finger to finger ; and I took him by the head, and he fell upon his face, and I trode upon his head. And the people fell to shouting, and my backers to singing. And I went up to the master

of the gladiators and took the branch. And he kissed me, and said to me, 'Daughter, peace be with thee.' And I began to go with glory through the door called *Sanavivaria*—that is, the door through which the live combatants passed out. "And I awoke, and understood that I was to fight not with the wild beasts but with the devil; but I knew that the victory was mine. This is what I have done up to the day before the sports: how the sports themselves will go, let some one else write, if he pleases."

To this diary of Perpetua's is appended a vision of Saturus, written likewise by himself.

"We had suffered," he says, "and we left the flesh, and began to be carried by four angels into the east; and their hands touched us not. But we went, not laid flat with upturned faces, but as if mounting an easy sloping hill. Now when we had cleared the world, we saw an infinite light, and I said to Perpetua (for she was at my side), 'This is that which the Lord promised us: we have received the promise.' And while we were carried by those four angels, there appeared before us a wide space, which was like a pleasure garden, full of rose trees and of every kind of flowers. The height of the rose trees was like that of cypresses, and the leaves of them fell" (or according to another reading, "sang") "without ceasing. And there in that pleasure garden were other four angels brighter than the rest, who, when they saw us, did us obeisance, and said to the other angels, 'There they are, there they are,' with admiration. And those four angels who carried us, in great fear set us down; and we walked on our own feet a furlong upon a broad way" (or according to another reading, "a furlong of nothing but violets"). "There we found Jucundus, and Saturninus, and

Artaxius, who were burnt alive in the same persecution; and Quintus, a martyr likewise, who had passed away in the prison: and we inquired of them where were the rest. The angels said to us, 'Come first, enter in, and salute the Lord.'

"And we drew nigh to the place: and the walls of the place were as if built of light: and before the door of that place four angels stood, who clothed those that entered with white robes. And we entered, and we heard an united voice saying"—in Greek, which was still the sacred language, in Africa as at Rome—" 'Holy, Holy, Holy,' continually. And we saw in that place, sitting, as it were a man with snow-white hair, and with a young man's countenance, and His feet we saw not; and on His right hand and on His left four elders, and behind them many other elders stood. And entering with great wonder, we stood before the throne. And four angels lifted us up; and we kissed Him, and with His hand He stroked us on the face. And the other elders said to us, 'Let us stand.' And we stood, and gave one another the kiss of peace. And the elders said to us, 'Go and play.' And I said to Perpetua, 'You have got what you wished for.' And she said to me, 'Thanks be to God, that however merry I was in the flesh, I am merrier now here.' "

Then followed a darker incident in the vision, reflecting the troubles of the militant Church which they had left.

"And we went forth, and we saw before the doors Optatus the bishop and Aspasius the presbyter, who gave the instructions, on the left, all by themselves and sad; and they threw themselves at our feet and said, 'Make peace between us, because you have departed and left us thus.' And we said to them,



‘Are not you our *Papa*’—“our Pope,” a name of filial affection then given to any respected bishop—“‘and are not you a priest, that you should fall at our feet?’ And we were moved, and embraced them. And Perpetua began to talk with them in Greek, and we took them apart into the pleasure garden under a rose tree. And while we talked with them, the angels said to them, ‘Let them alone, to refresh themselves; and if ye have any disputes among you, forgive one another.’ And they put them to confusion. And they said to Optatus, ‘Correct thy people: for they come to thy assembly like men returning from the races, and wrangling over their favourites.’ And it appeared to us as though they wished to close the gates. And there we began to recognise many brethren, but martyrs only. One and all we were fed with a sweet odour that cannot be described, which satisfied us. Then I awoke rejoicing.”

“These,” says Tertullian, if it is he, “are the more notable visions of those same blessed martyrs, Saturus and Perpetua, as written by themselves. Secundulus was called by God out of the world by a speedier departure, while yet in the prison. It was a favour to be spared the beasts.” The narrative then continues:—

“With regard to Felicity, to her likewise a favour of the Lord was vouchsafed. Being now in her eighth month, for she was with child when taken into custody, she was in great tribulation when the day of the show was now nigh at hand, lest because of her unborn child she should be put off, because it is not lawful for women with child to be put to death, and lest she should afterwards shed her holy and innocent blood in company with criminals. Her fellow-martyrs also were sadly grieved lest they should leave behind



them all alone so good a companion and fellow-traveller on the road of the same hope. Joining, therefore, in an united groaning, they poured out their prayer to the Lord on the third day before the exhibition. Immediately after the prayer her pains came upon her. And when, because of the natural difficulty of the eighth month, she was sorely distressed in bringing to the birth, one of the servants of the turnkeys said to her, 'If you are in such distress now, what will you do when you are thrown to the wild beasts? You despised them when you refused to sacrifice.' And she answered: 'Now it is I that suffer what I suffer; but there, another will be in me who will suffer for me, because I am to suffer for Him.' So she brought forth a maid child, which a certain sister brought up as her own daughter.

"Now, forasmuch as the Holy Ghost has permitted, and by permitting has willed, that the tale of the sports themselves should be written, although unworthy to complete the description of such glory, yet we will fulfil the duty bequeathed, and indeed imposed upon our honour, by Perpetua, adding a single instance of her constancy and loftiness of mind. When they were treated by the tribune with greater strictness, because some foolish people had alarmed him by suggesting that they might be secretly got out of prison by magical charms, Perpetua answered him to his face and said: 'Why, pray, do you not allow such distinguished criminals to refresh themselves,—the Caesar's own criminals, who are to fight upon his birthday? Is it not to your credit that we should be brought out yonder in good condition?' The tribune shuddered and blushed, and so ordered them to be more humanely treated, that her brethren and others might have leave to go in, and join

in their time of refreshment. The adjutant of the gaol was now himself a believer.

“On the day before their death, when they were partaking of that last meal which they call the free supper, and were making it, so far as they might, not a free supper, but a Christian *Agapé* or love-feast, they flung their words with undiminished constancy among the people, threatening them with the judgment of God, and testifying to the happiness of their passion, laughing at the curiosity of the crowds that came to look on ; and Saturus said, ‘To-morrow is not sufficient for you, then ; you so love to gaze upon what you hate. To-day friends, to-morrow enemies. Yet mark our faces well, that you may know us again in that Day.’ So they all departed awe-struck, and many of them believed.

“The day of their victory dawned, and they marched forth from the gaol to the amphitheatre, as if to heaven, with mirth in their countenances and with dignity. If they trembled, it was for joy and not for fear. Perpetua followed with a shining mien, like a true spouse of Christ, like the darling of God, by the keen glance of her eyes casting down the looks of all who gazed at her. Felicity also, rejoicing that she had had a safe delivery, so that she might do combat with the beasts, going from one shedding of blood to another, from the midwife to the gladiator, to wash herself after childbirth in a second baptism. And when they had brought them in at the gate, and wished to make them dress, the men as priests of Saturn, the women as devotees of Ceres, that noble constancy held out against it even to the end. For she pleaded, ‘It was to save our liberty from being interfered with, that we deliberately came to this. We devoted our lives for the very purpose that we should do nothing of

this kind. This was our bargain with you.' Injustice itself," says Tertullian, "recognised the justice of their plea; the tribune gave leave that they should be brought in exactly as they were. Perpetua fell to singing, already trampling on the head of her Egyptian. Revocatus and Saturninus and Saturus threatened the people who looked on for this. As soon as they came in sight of Hilarian, they began, by their gestures and beckonings, to say to him: 'You condemn us, but God will condemn you!' At this the people were so infuriated that they asked to have them beaten with scourges along a line of huntsmen. And they—what should they do but congratulate each other that they had even obtained one of those things which were inflicted on the Lord?

"Now He who said, 'Ask, and ye shall receive,' gave them, when they asked, that manner of departure which each had desired. For whenever they were talking together of their wishes for their martyrdom, Saturninus would profess that he wished to be exposed to all the beasts, that he might carry off, no doubt, a more glorious crown. And so, when the show was actually begun, he and Revocatus, after first having trial of a leopard, were then torn on the stage by the bear also. But there was nothing that Saturus more detested than a bear, while he was confident that one bite of the leopard would finish him. So when he was served to a wild boar, that beast ripped up the huntsman who had fastened him to it, and he died after the days of the exhibition. Saturus was only dragged about. And when he was tied up on the bridge for the bear to maul, the bear refused to come forth out of his den. And so the second time Saturus was called back again unhurt.

“For the young women the devil had made the unusual provision of an exceedingly savage cow, got for the purpose, matching their sex with that of the animal. So they were stripped, and wrapped up in nets, and brought in. The people were filled with horror to see the one a delicate girl, the other fresh from childbirth with breasts overflowing. So they were called back and clothed in flowing garments. Perpetua was tossed first, and fell upon her hip ; and as soon as she sat up she drew over her the tunic, which was rent at the side, thinking more of her modesty than of her pain. Then, calling for a pin, she fixed also her dishevelled hair with it, for it was not seemly for a martyr to suffer with dishevelled hair, lest in the midst of her triumph she should look as though she mourned. So she rose, and when she saw Felicity tossed, she approached and gave Felicity her hand and lifted her up ; and the pair stood side by side, and the hard-heartedness of the people was overcome, and they were called back to the *Sanavivaria* door. There Perpetua was taken in hand by a certain man, who was then a catechumen, Rusticus by name, who clave to her ; and as if she were awaked from sleep (so deep had she been in the spirit and in trance), she began to look round her, and to the astonishment of all she said, ‘I cannot tell when we are to be taken out to that cow.’ And when she heard what had already happened, she did not at first believe it, until she observed certain marks of the tossing upon her body and her dress. Then sending for her own brother, she addressed him and that catechumen, saying, ‘Stand fast in the faith, and all love one another ; and be not offended by our sufferings.’

“In another gate Saturus likewise was exhorting the



soldier Pudens, saying, 'Sure enough, as I foresaw and foretold, I have not yet felt any beast at all. And now, believe with all your heart. See, I go out yonder, and with one bite of the leopard I am perfected.' And straightway, at the end of the show, the leopard was turned loose, and with a single bite Satorius was so covered with blood that, as he turned round, the people shouted their testimony to his second baptism, saying, 'Good bath, good bath!'" Tertullian here makes a play upon the words, of which no rendering can be given in English. "Then he said to the soldier Pudens; 'Farewell, and remember the faith and me; and let these things not shake but confirm you.' And at the same time he asked for a ring from the man's finger, and dipped it in his own wound, and gave it back to him as a legacy, leaving it to him as a pledge and as a memorial of his blood. Then fainting, he was dragged away with the rest, to have his throat cut at the usual place. And when the crowd demanded that they should be brought into the middle, so that when the sword went into their bodies their eyes might follow and join in the murder, they rose up of their own accord and crossed over where the people wished, after having first kissed each other, that they might perfect their martyrdom with the solemn rites of peace. The rest received the sword without moving, and in silence; Satorius, in particular, who had gone up the ladder first, was the first to give up the ghost, for he was waiting for Perpetua. But Perpetua, that she might have some taste of pain, was stabbed between the bones, and shrieked; and taking the faltering hand of the young novice of a gladiator, she moved it to her own throat. Perhaps," so ends the story, "such a woman could not otherwise have been killed, because the un-



clean spirit was afraid of her, if she had not wished it herself.”<sup>1</sup>

Although the greatest, Perpetua and Felicity were not the last of their sex to suffer at Carthage for the name of Christ during that outbreak. In the year after their martyrdom, on the 18th of July, a Christian woman bearing the Punic name of Guddene, showed a fortitude not inferior to theirs. Four several times she was extended upon the rack known as the “hobby-horse,” and her body was horribly mangled with the executioner’s hook. Then for a very long time she was permitted to drag on her existence in a filthy prison, and was finally slain with the sword.<sup>2</sup>

It was impossible for the storm to rage long with such violence. There was some abatement for a time, and until the year 211 the Christians in Africa enjoyed a measure of repose. Then, under the government of Scapula, disturbances broke out again. In the fervent pamphlet which Tertullian addressed to Scapula, complaint is made of the vexations to which Christians were again subjected. Some of them were burned alive. Mavilus of Hadrumetum was given to the wild beasts. Tertullian compared unfavourably the position of Christians in proconsular Africa with that of the neighbouring provinces, where Christians were indeed put to death, but only with the sword.

Not that his fellow Christians were afraid, he said: the more trial, the greater the reward. But in language such as the old world seldom had heard, he dwelt upon the futility of these efforts to force men into religious acts which they inwardly abhorred. “It is part of the natural rights of man,” he cried, “to worship

<sup>1</sup> Ruinart, p. 80; Franchi de’ Cavalieri, *La Passio SS. Perpetuae et Felicitatis*; Robinson, *Texts and Studies*, vol. i. no. 2; Von Gebhardt, p. 61.

<sup>2</sup> *Martyrologium Adonis*, July 18.

according to individual conviction. No man is either the better or the worse for another man's religion. There is no religion in enforcing religion, for religion must be embraced freely and not under compulsion. Even in the case of your own sacrifices, a willing mind is required. Supposing you succeed in forcing us to sacrifice, it will do your gods no good. They will not want sacrifices from the unwilling."

Tertullian would not allow it to be said that he was using threats ; but he not only significantly pointed out the judgments which had fallen upon persecuting emperors and judges, he went on to show what trouble the Christians might give if they pleased. "Your cruelty is our glory. Look to it, or what we are made to suffer may drive us to break out, for the purpose of showing that we are not afraid of these things, but rather desire them. During the zealous persecution of Arrius Antoninus in Asia"—this was probably in the time of Marcus Aurelius—"all the Christians of a city assembled and presented themselves in a body at his tribunal. He ordered a few of them to execution, and remarked to the rest, 'Unhappy creatures ! If you want to die, you can find precipices and halters for yourselves !' If we too should choose to do the same, what will you do with so many thousands of people ? What number of fires and swords will you need ? What will Carthage do when decimated by you—when every one will recognise relations and bosom friends of his own amongst the number ; when he will very probably see among them men and matrons of your own rank, and leading personages, and relatives and friends of your own ?" <sup>1</sup> So difficult was the task of extirpating Christianity in Africa.

<sup>1</sup> Tertullian, *Ad Scapulam*, 5.

## CHAPTER VI

### MARTYRS OF ALEXANDRIA: POLYEUCTUS

FOR some years after the death of the emperor Severus, the Church was allowed to enjoy rest and tranquillity. One of his successors, Alexander Severus, went so far as not only to tolerate the existence of Christianity, but erected a statue of our Lord in his private oratory, in company with those of Abraham and Orpheus, and other heroes of religion. This emperor was succeeded by Maximin, who encouraged a fitful attempt to repress the leaders of the Church. The Bishop of Rome, named Pontian, together with the most celebrated teacher of the time at Rome, Hippolytus, was banished to Sardinia. There, in all probability in penal servitude in the mines, he expired, after enduring many beatings and other forms of ill-treatment. His successor, Anteros, got into trouble with the authorities by his zeal in collecting historical information about earlier martyrs, and was himself added to the number. In Cappadocia and Pontus, in consequence of earthquakes and other misfortunes, a movement against the Christians was set on foot, but it was of no great severity. The famous Origen was forced by his friends to leave Caesarea in Palestine, which was then his home, and take refuge, like his master Clement before him, in Cappadocia, where he was not known. Some of his friends at Caesarea were arrested and thrown into prison ; and Origen, from the

widow's house which gave him an obscure retreat, wrote to them his encouragements to martyrdom, in a style which, with all its piety, seems tame and quiet in comparison not only with the address of Tertullian in similar circumstances, but also with Origen's own language in his youth.

The accession of Decius in the year 249 was the signal for the greatest attack upon Christianity that had yet been made. Although Christianity had never been legally permitted, and was in constant danger of being molested, no general attempt had ever been made to stamp it out. Persecution had been local and spasmodic. Emperors had sometimes encouraged, and sometimes discouraged, the efforts of their officials to keep Christianity down. Decius was the first to issue edicts for its total suppression. He recognised the power of the great society, which had spread through all the provinces of the empire, which refused to join in the religion of the state, and owed allegiance to an authority which was not his. He determined to put forth the whole power of the state to crush the Church in every region of the empire at once.

Although the edict is lost in which the resolution of Decius was expressed, its tenor may be gathered from various sources. A day was fixed on which all the inhabitants of the empire were to sacrifice to the gods and to the genius of the emperor. Men and women were summoned individually and by name. Those who refused were to be compelled by heavy but unspecified penalties.<sup>1</sup>

At Alexandria—so the great bishop of that city, Denys, relates—troubles had begun a year before they began elsewhere. A “prophet and poet of evil,”

<sup>1</sup> Gregg, *Decian Persecution*, p. 71 foll.

whom he does not name, had worked upon the superstition of the people to incite them against the Christians.

“Inflamed by him, and laying hold of the powers of government for mischief, they thought that to massacre us was the way to serve their demons, and the only form of religion. First to be seized was an old man named Metras, whom they ordered to utter ungodly words ; and when he refused, they beat him with sticks, and stabbed him in the face and eyes with sharp reed pens, and brought him into the suburb of the city and stoned him. A faithful woman named Quinta was the next. They took her to the idol temple, and endeavoured to compel her to worship ; and when she turned her back upon the altar and expressed her abhorrence of it, they lashed her feet together and dragged her all through the city along the rough pavement, her body knocking against the big stones while they flogged her with a whip, until at last they brought her to the same spot and stoned her.

“Then with one accord they all attacked the houses of the worshippers of God ; their neighbours, to whom they were known, began in hot haste to drag out and rifle and make havoc of the contents, carrying off any possessions of value, and breaking up the inferior articles and everything made of wood, and making bonfires of them in the streets, so that it looked like the capture of a city by a hostile army. The brethren bowed to the storm, and got quietly out of the way, taking joyfully, like those of whom St. Paul speaks, the spoiling of their goods. And I do not know of any one—though there may perhaps have been one—who up to this time had denied the Lord.

“The aged and excellent virgin, Apollonia, was



seized, and struck on the cheeks until all her teeth were dashed out. They then built a bonfire in front of the city, and threatened to burn her alive in it, unless she would pronounce with them the formulas of ungodliness. She begged them to release her for a moment; and when they did so, she gathered up her strength and sprang into the fire and was consumed. Sarapion was found at home. They treated him with dreadful tortures; and after breaking all his joints, they threw him headlong from the upper storey. The streets, the squares, the lanes, were impassable for us, by night as well as by day. In every place, and without a pause, they all cried out that any one who would not utter aloud their blasphemous language should at once be dragged off to be burned."

This state of things continued at Alexandria for some while. Then there arose a dissension in the city, and the inhabitants came to blows with each other, and the Christians profited by the distraction. It was, however, only for a little while. When the news reached Egypt that Decius had succeeded to the throne, and had determined to reverse the lenient policy of his predecessors towards the Christians, a kind of panic arose among them.

"The edict arrived," says Denys. "It proved to be like that last terror which our Lord foretold, that should cause, if possible, even the elect to stumble. All quailed before it. Among those of high rank some in alarm fell in at once; those who held public offices followed their official instincts, while others were dragged along by those about them. When their names were called over, they advanced to the impure and unholy sacrifices, some with pale faces and trembling all over, as if they were going, not to sacri-

fice, but themselves to be offered as victims and slain in honour of the idols, so that the great crowd which surrounded them jeered at them, and everybody saw what cowards they were—afraid to die, and afraid to sacrifice alike. Others moved to the altars more briskly, endeavouring to convey by their bold demeanour the impression that they had never been Christians at all. The saying of our Lord about rich men came very true of these—they will indeed hardly be saved. In the lower ranks of life, both these classes found imitators; but some took to flight, others were captured. Of these last, some went as far as to bonds and imprisonment, and then, after a longer or shorter confinement, renounced their faith before they were brought to trial; others even endured torture for a time, and at last gave way.”

Such is the bishop’s candid account of the behaviour of many of his flock. But they were not all like these.

“But the firm and blessed pillars of the Lord,” he continues, “made strong by Him, and receiving power and might in proportion to the force of the faith which was in them, showed themselves admirable martyrs of His kingdom. The first was a man named Julian, so crippled with gout that he could neither stand nor go. He was brought up, with two others who carried him. One of the two denied at once; the other, called Cronion, who bore the surname of Eunous, or ‘Benevolent,’ along with the aged Julian, confessed our Lord; they were carried right through the city—you know how vast it is—aloft on the backs of camels, and scourged as they went; and finally, amidst the assembled multitude, were burned in an unquenchable fire. A soldier who was stationed near them as they were conveyed along, opposed those who ill-treated them; whereupon they turned their outcries against him, and the gallant

warrior—God's warrior—Besas, was arraigned, and after distinguishing himself in the great war, the war for religion, had his head cut off.

“Another, of Libyan nationality, who bore the appropriate name of Macar”—which means “blessed,” or “happy”—“was the object of the judge's earnest solicitation to deny his faith; but he would not yield, and was burned alive. After these, Epimachus and Alexander, after enduring a long imprisonment, and after the infliction of many sufferings from the claw and from the scourge, were consigned, like the others, to unquenchable fire. With them were four women. One of these, Ammonarium, a holy virgin, had declared beforehand to the judge that she would not utter a single thing which he commanded her to utter. Accordingly he tortured her at great length and with the utmost determination; but she fulfilled her promise, and was led to execution. Of the others, Mercuria was an aged and reverend woman; Dionysia had a large family, but did not love her children more than she loved the Lord. The governor was ashamed to go on torturing women without avail and to be beaten by them at last, and so ordered them to be executed with the sword, without submitting them to tortures, which their leader, Ammonarium, bore on behalf of all the four.

“Hero, Ater, and Isidore, three Egyptians, were delivered up, and with them Dioscorus, a boy of about fifteen. Thinking that the boy would not be hard to persuade, the magistrate first attempted to cajole him with fair words, and then to force him by tortures which he supposed that the lad could never resist; but Dioscorus yielded neither to argument nor to pain. After fiercely thrashing the elders of the party, who

bore it firmly, he sent them to the fire ; but he could not help admiring Dioscorus, who had made so noble a figure in public, and who had given such wise answers to the questions put to him in private, and he let him off, saying that he would grant him a respite for repentance, because of his tender age. And Dioscorus is with us to-day," writes his bishop proudly; "Dioscorus, worthy of his God, awaiting a longer fight and a more ample reward.

"Another Egyptian, Nemesion, was falsely accused of being a companion of robbers ; and when he had disproved this utterly unfounded charge before the centurion, he was denounced as a Christian, and so came as a prisoner before the governor. In flagrant defiance of justice the governor inflicted upon him twice as many tortures and lashes as upon the robbers themselves, and then burned him between the robbers, bestowing upon the saint the honour of being treated like Christ.

"A whole band of soldiers, Ammon, Zeno, Ptolemy, and Ingenes, and with them an old man called Theophilus, were present in court when a Christian was being tried and was showing signs of wavering. Full of indignation, they made faces to him, and lifted up their hands, and threw their bodies into sympathetic attitudes. This drew upon them the attention of all ; but before others could arrest them, they ran to the magistrate's platform, avowing themselves Christians, so that both the governor and his council were intimidated ; and while the prisoners at the bar took heart to meet their sufferings, those who judged them shrank in alarm. They passed from the court in procession, rejoicing in their martyrdom, God leading them in triumph gloriously."



The eye of Denys travelled beyond his episcopal city to those who suffered for their faith in the country. "In the towns and villages," he says, "great numbers were torn in pieces by the heathen. I will mention a single case as an example. Ischyriion was the salaried steward of a magistrate. The man in whose pay he was ordered him to sacrifice. He refused, and the man insulted him ; he stuck to his refusal, and he loaded him with abuse ; at last, when he persisted, the man took a big stick and drove it through his body to the vital organs, and he died.

"I need not tell in detail of those who wandered in deserts and mountains, and perished of hunger and thirst and cold and disease, by robbers and by wild beasts. Those of them who survived are witnesses of the election and victory of the others. I will give an instance. There was a man of extreme old age, the Bishop of Nilopolis, whose name was Chaeremon. This man fled to the hills in the direction of Arabia, accompanied by his wife, and never came back. They were never seen again, and although the brethren made anxious search for them, they were never discovered, alive or dead. Many a one in those same mountains was carried into slavery by the barbarous Saracens ; some of whom were only released on payment of a heavy ransom, and others are still not released."<sup>1</sup>

The great Bishop of Alexandria himself was the subject of a curious adventure. "I speak in the presence of God," he writes to one who had found fault with him for not remaining at his post ; "He knows whether I lie. It was not my own doing that I fled, nor was it without the guidance of God. Before, when the persecution of Decius broke out, Sabinus"—the

<sup>1</sup> The letter is found in Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* vi. 41, 42.



governor—"sent an agent forthwith to look for me, and I waited four days at home, expecting the agent to come. But that officer scoured the country in search of me, examining the rivers, the roads, the fields, and every place where he thought it likely that I should hide or travel. Nowhere did he catch sight of me. He could not find the right house, for he never believed that the object of his pursuit would keep at home. After four days, God bade me go elsewhere, and prepared the way for me in a remarkable manner, and reluctantly I and my sons and a good number of the brethren started together. That this was providential was shown by the sequel, in which I may perhaps have been of use to some."

The bishop's flight was soon arrested. "About sunset, together with my attendants, I was taken under guard of the soldiers to Taposiris. But Timothy, as the providence of God would have it, happened to be away at the moment and so escaped being caught. Coming to the house a little later, Timothy found the house deserted, with officers guarding it, and that we had been carried away captive. A peasant met him as he fled in consternation, and asked him why he was in such haste. Timothy told him the truth ; and when the man heard it (he was on his way to a wedding festivity ;—it is their custom to spend all the night together when they meet on such occasions), he went in and told the guests. With one accord, as if it had all been pre-arranged, they sprang to their feet, and ran full speed, and threw themselves upon us with shouts ; the soldiers who guarded us took at once to flight, and they burst in upon us, as we lay upon our bare bedsteads. I (God knows), supposing them at first to be robbers, come to despoil and plunder, lay still on the bed which

I occupied, with only my linen garment on ; the rest of my clothes lay beside me, and I offered them to them, but they told me to get up and be off as quickly as I could. Then, seeing what their business was, I cried out, and besought and entreated them to go away and let us alone ; or if they wished to do a kind deed, I begged them to cut off my head themselves before my captors came back to do it. While I was calling out in this manner, as my companions could tell you, they forced me to get up ; I threw myself face downwards on the floor, and they laid hold of me by the hands and feet, and dragged me out of the house. I was followed by Gaius, Faustus, Peter, and Paul, who were witnesses of all this. These four picked me up and carried me hurriedly out of the little town, and set me on the bare back of an ass and led me away.”<sup>1</sup> They conveyed him to an uninhabited spot in Libya, three days’ journey from the town of Paraetionium, where they kept him till the persecution of Decius was over.

The leading presbyters of the church of Alexandria, Faustinus and Aquila, by their character as public men, were forced to imitate their bishop and escape from the city, and spent their time wandering up and down Egypt wherever they could find safety. Four other presbyters, whom Denys names, remained to superintend the brethren. One of them was afterwards the successor of Denys in the bishopric. A terrible plague had lately raged in the town and thinned the ranks of the clergy ; but three faithful deacons aided the priests in their holy work. One of them, named Faustus, survived this persecution by more than half a century, and in extreme old age attained to martyrdom

<sup>1</sup> In Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* vi. 40.

in the last of the persecutions, when his head was cut off. Another, named Eusebius, who rose to eminence at a later time, was particularly energetic in visiting the Christians in prison, and in burying the bodies of the martyrs. "For even to this day," writes Denys, "the governor continues relentlessly to slay, to torture, to wear out with bonds and imprisonment, those who are brought before him, and forbids any to have access to them, and searches for any Christians who show themselves; and yet by the zeal and persistency of the brethren God still gives comfort to the victims of oppression."<sup>1</sup>

Persons who desired to prove that they had duly taken part in the sacrifices required by Decius were able to procure certificates, or *libelli*, in testimony that they had done so. Until recent years, the form and contents of these certificates were a matter for conjecture; but in the year 1893, scholars who were digging in the district of Egypt called Fayûm, came upon two of these very certificates, written on papyrus. Ten years later, a third was discovered in another part of Egypt. They are all in the same form, showing how systematic and uniform the procedure was. One of the Fayûm *libelli*, which is now at Berlin, runs thus:

"To the sacrifice-commissioners of the village of Alexander's Island, from Aurelius Diogenes, the son of Satabus, of the village of Alexander's Island, aged 72; scar on his right eyebrow.

"I have always sacrificed regularly to the gods, and now, in your presence, in accordance with the edict, I have done sacrifice, and poured the drink-offering, and tasted of the sacrifices, and I request you to certify the same. Farewell.

<sup>1</sup> In Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* vii. 11.

“ Handed in by me, Aurelius Diogenes.”

Then follows the signature of the magistrate, partly obliterated, to say, “ I certify that I saw him sacrificing.” Then comes the date :

“ In the first year of the Emperor Cæsar Gaius Messius Quintus Trajanus Decius, Pius, Felix, Augustus ; the second of the month Epiph.”<sup>1</sup>

It must not be too hastily assumed that Diogenes, the son of Satabus, and the holders of the other two *libelli*, were Christians who fell away. Very probably every one who performed the test sacrifice provided himself with such a certificate ; at any rate, many who had never been Christians might be glad to be protected by the possession of them. But in many places, and especially in Africa, there were Christians who did not hesitate to purchase certificates of the kind from unscrupulous magistrates, without performing the sacrifice, or who accepted them when procured for them by anxious friends.

In Palestine, the troubled career of Denys' master, Origen, was once more visited by the hand of persecution. Eusebius says that of all who were called upon to endure the fight of afflictions, none were more tried than he. “ Bonds and bodily torments, the penalties of the iron collar and of the innermost dungeon, were inflicted upon him. For many days together his feet were stretched to the fourth hole on the penal wood. He bore steadfastly the threats of fire, and all else that the enemy usually employed. The judge exerted himself to the utmost to keep him from dying under the infliction.” His utterances during these trials were full of edification, but unfortunately Eusebius did not think it necessary to quote at length from his epistles,

<sup>1</sup> To be found in Von Gebhardt's *Ausgewählte Märtyreracten*, p. 182.



as he did from those of Denys, and they are now lost to us.<sup>1</sup> For some reason or another the life of Origen was again spared, and he died a natural death some three years later. His friend and associate from youth, Alexander, Bishop of Jerusalem, who had already suffered many years of imprisonment at the beginning of the century, was once more thrown into prison, where he died. In like circumstances, about the same time, died the famous Babylas, Bishop of Antioch, and, according to St. Chrysostom, begged that his irons might be buried with him in his grave.

In Cappadocia, if we may believe the highly coloured account of one who wrote more than a hundred years after, the persecution was unusually violent. The number of those who abjured their faith was large. One of the most illustrious of Origen's disciples, Gregory, known as the Wonder-worker, was bishop of the chief city of the province, and, seeing the frailty of his flock, exhorted them to seek safety in flight. He himself set them the example. Accompanied by a convert of his, who had formerly been the keeper of a heathen temple, he took refuge in an uninhabited mountain range. His hiding-place was treacherously disclosed to the enemy, but they failed to find him. The story went that Gregory and his deacon, seeing the search-party approaching, stood on the hill-top and prayed with hands spread out to heaven ; and that when the seekers returned to the bottom of the hill, and were questioned about it, they said that they had seen nothing but two trees standing a little apart from each other. Meanwhile, men, women, and children were seized and tortured and slain. They were sustained in their combat, like the Israelites at Rephidim,

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* vi. 39.



by the prayers of their bishop on the hill. The name of one martyr out of the many has been preserved. He was a youth of noble family called Troadius; and it is said that Gregory in his wilderness described to his companion the trial, the torture, the victory of Troadius, step by step, as it proceeded.<sup>1</sup>

In the district of Melitene, near the border of Armenia, a famous martyr named Polyeuctus entered into glory. Corneille has made his story the subject of a pathetic play. It is not easy to say how much of the existing narrative is historical, but there is no reason to reject the whole as false.

Polyeuctus and Nearchus were soldiers in the same legion, and inseparable friends. Nearchus was a Christian, but Polyeuctus was not. When the edict of Decius was published, Nearchus was deeply distressed, and shrank from intercourse with his friend. The other questioned him about his change of behaviour, and at length discovered the danger in which Nearchus stood. His grief was increased when Nearchus told him that their friendship must cease with death, for in the general belief of Christians of the time there was no hope after death for those who had not received the Gospel in this life. Polyeuctus made up his mind to throw in his lot with his Christian friend. A dream which came to him tended to confirm his purpose. He saw a figure, which he understood to be that of Christ, approach and strip him of the soiled military cloak which he wore, and clothe him with a more glorious one, as bright as light; at the same time the visitor mounted him upon a winged horse. Polyeuctus reminded Nearchus that he had always listened with respect and admiration when his

<sup>1</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *De Vita Greg. Thaum.* p. 571.

friend told him of Christ and read the Scriptures to him, and he professed that it was his desire to expose the folly of idolatry, and all the craft and deceit that accompanied it.

Nearchus was overjoyed at this announcement, but he could not help fearing that when the test was applied, as it soon would be, Polyeuctus would be unable to resist the inducement to sacrifice. But Polyeuctus was confident of himself. His only misgiving was lest he should be put to death before receiving baptism, and so should fail to be accepted by Christ. Nearchus reassured him on that point, telling him how the Penitent Robber who confessed Christ upon the cross was accepted, though unbaptized. The soul of Polyeuctus was all on fire. He drew Nearchus to the place where the edict of Decius was posted up, read it through with scorn and indignation, and then plucked it from the wall or pillar and tore it in pieces. A few moments after, they met a procession carrying back to the temple the idols which had been borne through the streets, all decked with leaves and branches. The zeal of the newly converted overcame all thoughts of prudence, and Polyeuctus stepped up to the idols and dashed them on the ground and trampled on them.

The local magistrate, Felix, upon whom fell the duty of enforcing the edict, was father to Polyeuctus' wife. He was profoundly grieved at what had occurred. He entreated Polyeuctus not to commit himself further until he had seen his wife. Polyeuctus replied that wife or child were nothing to him, unless they would take the same road upon which he had entered. Upon this the attendants struck him in the face with rods, but Polyeuctus was unmoved. The outrage only provoked

him to rebuke his father-in-law for lending himself to the ungodly will of perishing men, and for using the love of wife and children to tear a man from his Saviour. His wife, covered with tears, came to the spot and upbraided him for destroying "the twelve gods." He told her that there were plenty more of that kind, and besought her to follow his religious change and lay hold upon eternal life.

Felix, after conferring with his advisers, sentenced him to be beheaded. The martyr awaited the execution of the sentence with great calmness, conversing with his fellow Christians all the time. He saw, he said, a young man leading him on—doubtless he meant Christ—and felt sure that, unbaptized as he was, the seal of Christ was upon him. His last words—words of encouragement and affection—were addressed to his friend Nearchus.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Aubé, *Polyeucte dans l'histoire*; Conybeare, *Monuments of Early Christianity*, p. 123.

## CHAPTER VII

### PIONIUS AND ACHATIUS

AT Smyrna, the city of Polycarp, there were still, in the time of Decius, Christians worthy of the commendation addressed to their church in the Apocalypse of St. John ; and the story of Pionius and his two associates may almost be read side by side with the story of Polycarp as a record of loyal devotion to Christ. Eusebius, who makes a curious mistake with regard to the date of their martyrdom and supposes them to have been contemporary with Polycarp, speaks of Pionius as "one of the most celebrated martyrs of the period." He found the story of Pionius, just as it now stands before us in its original language, in the same volume with the Martyrdoms of Polycarp and of Carpus and Papyrus, and embodied it in a collection of his own which is now unhappily lost. He calls attention to the repeated "confessions" of Pionius, to his "freedom of speech," to his "defences of the faith before the people and the rulers," to his "instructive public addresses" and his "considerate reception of those who had succumbed to the temptations of the persecution," to the "encouragements which he offered in the prison to the brethren who visited him," to "the tortures which he subsequently endured and the pains which followed them," to his "nailings and his endurance at the stake," and to "the end which crowned all his wonderful deeds."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* iv. 15.

Pionius himself was a presbyter. One of those who were with him, a woman named Sabina, had been a slave. Her mistress, in the reign of Gordian, had endeavoured to detach her from her faith, and, failing in the attempt, had sent her in chains to a place in the hills, where the brethren had supplied her wants. Making her escape, she took refuge with Pionius, and lived in his house under the name of Theodota. Asclepiades, the third, appears to have been a man of diminutive stature.

It was the festival of St. Polycarp, and "a great sabbath," when they were arrested. A monition had come to Pionius on the vigil of the festival, as he fasted in company with Sabina and Asclepiades, that they would be seized the next day; and, like the prophets of earlier times, he put ropes round his own neck and theirs as a sign that they were ready to be taken to prison and to death. They had scarcely finished their prayers on St. Polycarp's day, "and taken holy bread and water," when Polemo, the chief officer of public worship, appeared with his attendants and carried them away. No work was going on in Smyrna that day. The people in the streets saw them going along with the ropes round their necks, and crowded into the market-place. Greeks and Jews, men and women, they clambered upon benches and boxes, and into the upper storey of the porches which ran round the market-place, in order to get a better view.

When they had reached the porch on the eastern side of the square, which was provided with two gates, Polemo addressed his prisoners and advised them to sacrifice, like everybody else, lest they should be punished. Pionius, who was probably well known in Smyrna for a learned and eloquent man, with a joyful



countenance stretched out his hand and made a speech to the people. "I hear," he said, "that you are amused at those who desert the Christian faith, and make sport of their fall. You Greeks ought to remember the advice of your Homer, who says that it is wicked to boast over dying men. You Jews know how Moses commanded that if a man saw even his enemy's ass fallen to the ground, he ought to help him." He warned them of a judgment to come, in view of which it was impossible for him to join in the heathen sacrifices. He was a travelled man, and he said that he had seen at the Dead Sea and elsewhere the results of a judgment which in a partial manner foreshowed the universal judgment to come.

The silence was intense, and not a whisper interrupted the speaker. The officials listened as quietly as the rest, until Pionius ended by saying twice over, in the words of the Book of Daniel, "We will not serve your gods, nor worship the golden image." Then they led them out into the open square. Idle people flocked round them. "We are fond of you, Pionius," they said ; "you have good manners, and are a reasonable man. You ought not to die. Do what we say. It is good to live and see this light." "Yes, life is good," he answered, "but there is a better life. Light is good, if it be the true light. All around us is good and fair ; we do not wish for death or hate the works of God ; but there is a better world, in comparison of which we despise this. You are laying a trap for us."

A well-known bad character of the town, called Alexander, interrupted, "Listen to me, Pionius." "No," said Pionius ; "do you try to listen to me. What you know, I know ; but I understand some things of which you know nothing." Alexander en-

deavoured to turn the laughter upon Pionius by pointing to his ropes, and saying ironically, "And what are those for?" The prisoner told him: the ropes were a sign that their minds were made up; that there was no need to take him and the others to the temple of the Nemeses, where the sacrifice was going on; that they would go straight to prison. "Perhaps," he said, "even with ropes you could not have got us into your idol temples." The discomfited Alexander could only mutter something about not listening to people who were not allowed to live.

A wish was expressed to adjourn to the theatre, where the words of Pionius could be better heard. Polemo was willing to consent, but some influential people dissuaded him, fearing that it might lead to a disturbance and an enquiry. "Pionius," said the official, "although you will not sacrifice, go with us to the temple." This, he thought, might be a sufficient compliance on the part of the Christians. "It will do your idols no good for us to go there," answered Pionius. "Be persuaded," said Polemo. "I wish," replied Pionius, "that I could persuade you to become Christians." At this there was great laughter. "You will not get us to be burned alive," said some one. "It is much worse to be burned after you are dead," was the martyr's retort. The Christian Sabina could not help smiling at it. "Do you laugh?" they said. "Yes, please God," she answered; "we are Christians: all who believe in Christ will laugh without misgiving in eternal joy." They threatened her with something worse than burning, but she calmly answered, "The holy God will look to that."

Polemo again attempted to persuade Pionius, but he answered, "Your orders are either to persuade

or to punish: you cannot persuade me, therefore punish." "Come, Pionius, sacrifice," the dialogue went on. "No, I am a Christian." "What God do you worship?" "The Almighty God who made heaven and earth, and all things that are in them, and us all; who richly gives us all things; whom we have known through Christ, who is His Word." "Then sacrifice to the emperor, if you will not sacrifice to the gods." "I cannot sacrifice to a human being; I am a Christian."

Then began the formal interrogations of a law court, the notary taking all down. "What is your name?" "Pionius." "Are you a Christian?" "Yes." The official was aware that there were divisions among the Christians of his time; even some shreds of their language were known to him. "Of what church?" he asked. "Of the Catholic Church: there is no other in the sight of Christ." Sabina's replies were a repetition of her protector's. Those of Asclepiades only varied in that when asked what being he worshipped, he answered, "Christ Jesus." "Is that a different one?" asked Polemo. "No," said the Christian, "He is the same of whom the others have spoken."

They were taken to the prison. As they made their way through the crowd, some remarked how the well-known countenance of Pionius was changed; he was usually pale, but to-day he looked fresh and ruddy. Sabina clung to his garment for fear of being parted from him by the crowd. "Look," cried some one, "the babe is afraid that she is going to be weaned." "If they will not sacrifice," shouted a fierce voice, "punish them." But that was beyond the powers of Polemo. "I have no lictors," he

answered ; " I have no authority to punish." " See," said some one, pointing to Asclepiades, " there goes a little man to sacrifice." " That is a lie," answered Pionius ; " he will do nothing of the sort." The names of Christians who had sacrificed were mentioned. Pionius answered, " Every man is free to act for himself ; my name is Pionius ; what others do is no concern of mine." " To think that a man of such education should come to this," said some one. " The education you know best," replied Pionius, " brought you famine and death and all kinds of troubles." He referred to sufferings which had lately visited the district. " You," was the retort, " felt the hunger like the rest of us." " I did," he replied, " but I had hope in God."

At last with difficulty they reached the prison, and were delivered over to the warders. In the prison they found other sufferers for conscience awaiting them. One was " a presbyter of the Catholic Church," named Limnus ; another, a woman called Macedonia from a village in the neighbourhood ; a third, called Eutychian, was an adherent of the Montanist sect. The faithful at Smyrna, as elsewhere, came to bring offerings for the prisoners ; but Pionius refused to accept them. " When we needed them more than we do now," he said—no doubt referring to the time of famine—" we would not be burdensome to any one ; we cannot think of accepting presents now." This abstemiousness did not suit the gaolers, who were accustomed to make a good thing out of the indulgences which they granted to those who visited their prisoners. They punished Pionius and his friends by thrusting them into the inner ward, where they saw nobody, and

had no chance of getting any attentions. The conduct of the prisoners was not affected by the change ; they glorified God and said nothing, and behaved to their gaolers just as before. Their meekness told upon their captors : the governor of the prison brought them back into the large front division of the building, where they could talk freely and pray day and night.

There they were frequently visited by heathens, who came to argue and went away baffled and admiring, and conversed with fresh Christian prisoners, who brought reports of what was going on outside. Apostasies were still frequent, even among those who had lived pious and edifying lives. The bishop himself, who occupied the throne of St. Polycarp, fell to the lowest depth. One day, after Pionius had been teaching some of his visitors how to answer the Jews, who were actively attempting to proselytise among the persecuted Christians, the minister of public worship, Polemo, reappeared, in company with a military officer called Theophilus, and a troop of police. "See," they said, "Euctemon, your superior, has sacrificed. Do you the same. Lepidus and Euctemon are asking for you at the temple of the Nemeses." Pionius knew better than to submit to men who had no lawful authority over him. "Persons committed to prison," he answered, "ought to be reserved for the coming of the proconsul. Why do you usurp his office?" They did not venture to deny the plea. They withdrew for a few minutes ; then they returned, and Theophilus said, "The proconsul has sent to have you conveyed to Ephesus." Pionius replied, "Let the proconsul's messenger come and take us." "He is a distinguished captain," answered Theophilus ; "but if you refuse, I am a magistrate myself."



So saying, he seized the kind of veil which the Christian had over his head and shoulders, gave it a twist round his throat which nearly strangled him, and put it into the hand of one of the policemen, to take him out of the prison. When they reached the market-place the Christians threw themselves down upon the ground, that they might not be taken to the temple. The struggles of Pionius were so violent that it took six of the constables to hold him.

Still struggling, and shouting, "We are Christians," his bearers got him at last to the altar, where they laid him on the ground. The apostate bishop was still standing beside it, as when he had sacrificed. No word was exchanged between him and his presbyter. Lepidus, whose office and position is not mentioned, asked Pionius why he and the others would not sacrifice, like Euctemon. "Because we are Christians," was the answer. "What god do you worship?" "The Maker of heaven and earth and sea and all that is in them." "Is that the one who was crucified?" "He was sent by God for the salvation of the world." This raised a loud laugh among the officials, and Lepidus cursed Christ. Pionius protested: "Reverence religion," he cried; "respect justice; recognise the claims of humanity; be guided by your own laws. You punish us for disobeying them, and you do not obey them yourselves. Your orders are to punish, not to compel."

A rhetorician of the name of Rufinus bade him stop, and give up his vain notions. "Is this your rhetoric?" cried Pionius; "do you find that in your books? Socrates did not suffer like this at the hands of the Athenians. Now everybody is an Anytus or a Meletus:" these were the accusers of Socrates. "Do

you consider that Socrates, and Aristides, and Anaxarchus, and the rest, were men of vain notions because they practised philosophy, and righteousness, and endurance?"

A man of rank and local distinction rudely told Pionius not to make such a noise. Lepidus said the same. "And do not you employ force," replied the martyr; "light a fire, and we will step into it for ourselves." A voice in the crowd shouted, "This is the man who scares the others from sacrificing." Garlands were set upon the heads of the Christians, as was the way when men were going to sacrifice; but they tore them off and flung them away. The public servant whose business it was, stood near with the sacrificial food in his hand; but he was afraid to come near any of the Christians to offer it to them, and finally, amidst the amusement of the spectators, ate it himself.

The Christians meanwhile kept crying, "We are Christians;" and at last, seeing that all efforts to make them sacrifice were useless, they conducted them back to prison. Blows and mockery fell upon them as they went. "Could you not die in your own country?" said some one to Sabina. "What is my own country?" she replied: "I am Pionius' sister." The man who was providing for the public games at Smyrna remarked to Asclepiades, "When you are condemned, I shall ask to have you for my son's exhibition of gladiators." "That is not the way to frighten me," was the spirited answer. As they entered the gaol, one of the police officers gave Pionius such a knock on the head that the blood ran. Pionius said nothing; but the Christians believed that his assailant's hands and side immediately began to swell up. The psalms and prayers of the Christians showed their thankfulness for having been

helped to pass through the trial of their steadfastness without yielding. What they were told of the miserable fall of Euctemon gave a terrible point to their thanksgivings. It was at the desire of the unhappy prelate, so they were informed, that pressure was put upon them to sacrifice. Euctemon had himself provided the victim, and after tasting of it at the spot, which was all that the law required, had expressed a wish to take the rest home with him, that he might make the most of the festive occasion. The thoroughness with which he played his new part, wearing his garland, and swearing by the genius of the emperor and by the Nemeses that he was no Christian, amused the people of Smyrna. Most of those who abjured Christianity cut the ceremony as short as they could.

After some time the proconsul came to Smyrna, and Pionius was brought before him. The usual interrogations were gone through again. "What is your name?" "Pionius." "Will you sacrifice?" "No." "What form of worship or persuasion do you belong to?" "That of the Catholics." "What do you mean by the Catholics?" The term conveyed nothing to the proconsul. "I am a presbyter of the Catholic Church." "Are you their teacher?" "Yes; I taught." "Were you a teacher of folly?" "Of religion, sir." "What religion?" "The religion of God the Father, the Maker of all things." The proconsul had no wish to prolong a theological inquiry. "Sacrifice," he said bluntly. "No; I can only pray to God." "Why, we all worship the gods, and heaven, and the gods in heaven. Why do you lift your eyes to the sky? Sacrifice to it." "I lift my eyes, not to the sky, but to Him who made it and all that is in it." "Tell me, who was it that made it?" "I cannot tell you."

"To be sure, it was God—that is, Zeus, who is in heaven: he is the king of all the gods." The proconsul hoped that Pionius would accept the identification, and so comply with the edict; but the Christian gave no sign of acceptance.

He was strung up. "Sacrifice," said the officers of the court. He refused again. They tore him with iron talons. "Change your mind," they said; "what desperation is this?" "It is no desperation; it is the fear of the living God." Quintilian, the proconsul, interposed again. "Many others have sacrificed," he said, "and they are alive and in their right mind." "I cannot sacrifice." "I entreat you to consider a little with yourself and change your mind." "Not I, sir." One of those present said, "Why are you so bent upon death?" "Not upon death," said the martyr, "but upon life." "You are so bent upon death that you make nothing of it," said Quintilian, losing something of his patience. "Sometimes when men are prosecuted for quite a small sum of money, they will brave death with the wild beasts. You are one of those men. Since you are bent upon death, you shall be burned alive." He wrote the sentence upon the usual tablet, and the clerk read it aloud in Latin: "We have ordered Pionius, who has confessed himself to be a Christian, to be burned alive."

The racecourse was the spot selected for the execution. Pionius made his way to it with alacrity, and stripped himself with his own hands, while the gaoler stood by. The exposure of his virginal flesh filled him with thankfulness to God, who had kept him in honourable purity of life. Lifting up his eyes to heaven, "he stretched himself with open arms on the stake, and made it easy for the soldier to drive

the nails in. When he was thus fastened, the officer in charge said once more, 'Change your mind, and the nails shall be drawn.' He answered, 'I felt that they were in.' Then after a moment's meditation he said, 'The reason why I hasten to die is that I may rise the sooner.' " The Christians of early days were accustomed to think much about the difference between the first and the second resurrection. When the stake was in position, another was reared beside it, to which was fastened a presbyter of the heretical sect of the Marcionites, whose name was Metrodore. Probably the writer of the narrative intended to imply that there was a likeness between the martyrdom of Pionius and the death of Him who was crucified between thieves. He notes that the place of honour, as on Calvary, was given to the sufferer with whom his sympathies lay. "They happened to set Pionius on the right and Metrodore on the left ; but," he adds, with perhaps a deeper pathos than he intended, "both of them were looking towards the east." When the logs were piled round them, Pionius closed his eyes. The bystanders thought that he was dead ; but he was praying in silence, and when he had finished his prayer he opened his eyes again. The flames were now high, and, with a countenance full of joy, Pionius said his "Amen" aloud ; then, with the words, "Lord, receive my soul," he quietly breathed his last, "and gave his spirit into the charge of the Father, who has promised that He will preserve all blood that is unjustly shed, and every soul that is unjustly condemned."

So "he passed," say those who saw him, "through the strait gate into the broad, great light." His very body, to their eyes, bore testimony to his triumph. It was like the well-nourished body of an athlete. His



ears were un mutilated. The hair was not discomposed, and the beard was crisp and curly. The face seemed to shine, so that the Christians who looked upon it were filled with joy, while unbelievers went away conscience-stricken.<sup>1</sup>

A month or two after the martyrdom of Pionius a man named Maximus, without waiting to be seized, came forward and offered himself of his own accord to the proconsul, Optimus, probably at Ephesus, the usual residence of the proconsul of Asia. The following dialogue ensued:—

“What is your name?” “I am called Maximus.”  
“What is your position?” “Born free, but a servant of Christ.” “What is your profession?” “I am an ordinary tradesman.” “Are you a Christian?” “Yes; sinner though I am, I am a Christian.” “Are you not acquainted with the imperial decrees which have lately come?” “Which?” “That the Christians are to leave their unprofitable superstition and acknowledge the true sovereign, who is supreme over all, and to worship his gods.” “I know the iniquitous ordinance of the king of this world, and that was why I came forward.” “Then sacrifice to the gods.” “I sacrifice to none but to the only God, to whom I am thankful to say that I have sacrificed from my infancy.” “Sacrifice, if you wish your life to be spared. If you will not, I shall bring you down with various tortures.” “That is what I have always wanted. It was for that reason that I presented myself, in order to exchange this miserable temporal existence for eternal life.”

The proconsul ordered him to be beaten with rods. While the order was executed, Optimus said to him, “Sacrifice, Maximus, that you may be set free from

<sup>1</sup> Von Gebhardt's *Ausgew. Märtyreracten*, p. 96.

these sufferings." "Those are no sufferings," answered Maximus, "which are borne for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; they are a soothing ointment. There would be real sufferings for me, and everlasting sufferings, if I were to depart from the commands of my Lord, which I learned from His Gospel."

Then the proconsul had him strung on the hobbyhorse. As the torture went forward, Optimus addressed him again: "Unhappy man, even now give up your folly, and sacrifice, that you may gain your life." "I shall gain my life," he replied, "if I do not sacrifice. If I sacrifice, I lose it." The thought of the communion of the saints comforted the solitary sufferer in his pains. "I do not feel the rods," he cried, "nor the hooks, nor the fire. The grace of Christ abides in me; and by the prayers of all the saints it will save me for ever. The saints passed through this conflict, and overcame your rage, and left us the example of their virtues."

The proconsul then gave his final sentence. For his refusal to obey the sacred laws and to sacrifice to the great goddess Diana, "the divine clemency," which was wielded by the proconsul, ordered him to be stoned to death as a caution to other Christians.<sup>1</sup>

The proconsul went to Lampsacus, on the Hellespont. There a young man named Peter was brought before him for trial, who confessed himself a Christian. When the magistrate bade him sacrifice to Venus, he replied that the character ascribed to Venus in the mythologies made her anything but a proper object of religious worship. "I," he cried, "must offer to Christ, who is the living and true God and the King of Ages, the sacrifice of prayer and supplication, of

<sup>1</sup> Ruinart, p. 133.

penitence and of praise." The severest tortures were used to break his spirit, but the more he was tortured the more resolute the lad became. "I thank Thee, O Lord Jesus Christ," he cried amidst his pains, "who hast vouchsafed to grant me this power of endurance, to the confounding of the wicked tyrant." The magistrate whom he thus described, seeing that pain had no terrors for him, ordered him to be executed with the sword.<sup>1</sup>

At Troas, to which city the proconsul proceeded with a great retinue, three more Christians were presented to him. To his questions about their home and their religion, Nicomachus, who took the lead among them, answered impatiently in a loud voice, "I am a Christian." The others said the same. "Sacrifice to the gods," said the magistrate to Nicomachus, "as you are bidden." Nicomachus answered, "As you are aware, a Christian may not sacrifice to devils." He was hung up, and torture was applied. He bore it for a long time; and then, when his strength was quite exhausted, and the breath of life had nearly failed, the unhappy man cried loudly, "It is a mistake. I never was a Christian; I sacrifice to the gods." He was instantly taken down. The sacrificial flesh was put into his dying hands and lips, when a last spasm seized him; he fell forwards, and, gnawing his tongue, died the death of an apostate.

There was a young girl of sixteen among the spectators, whose name was Dionysia. She was a Christian. The sight so horrified her, that she could not help crying out, "Poor, miserable wretch! for the sake of one short moment you have got pains that cannot be expressed for ever and ever!" Dionysia

<sup>1</sup> Ruinart, p. 134.

was dragged forward. Optimus (if indeed it was the same proconsul who sentenced Maximus) asked her if she was a Christian. "Yes," she answered, "I am a Christian. That is why I am sorry for that poor man, because he could not endure a little to find eternal rest." "He is at rest," the proconsul replied: "the great Diana and Venus have taken him. Now follow his example and sacrifice, or you will be badly handled first, and then burned alive." "My God," the girl answered, "is greater than you, so I am not afraid of your threats. He will enable me to endure whatever you inflict upon me."

The next day, Andrew and Paul, the two companions of Nicomachus, were again brought before the judge. The priests of Diana had set up an agitation among the people to obtain their punishment. The two men refused to sacrifice to that goddess or to any other. They said that they could not recognise any of the devils whom the heathen worshipped, and that they had never worshipped any other than the only true God. The populace was so incensed against them, that the proconsul thought best to give the Christians over to them to be stoned to death, instead of a more regular form of execution. Their feet were lashed together, and they were dragged outside the town to die.

Meanwhile, the young Dionysia had spent a night of agony in the hands of the ruffians to whose tender mercies she had been consigned. The legend tells of a miraculous interposition which protected her from injury; 'but it is not to be trusted in every detail. When the morning came, it seems that she was being led to receive her final sentence, when she met the crowd that was dragging Andrew and Paul to their

death. By a sudden movement she freed herself from her guard, and flung herself upon her fellow Christians, crying, "Let me die with you upon earth, that I may live with you in heaven." But the proconsul would not allow her to share their form of martyrdom. By his orders Dionysia was detached from them, and beheaded.<sup>1</sup>

There were other martyrs who perished about the same time in the neighbouring province of Bithynia. The Acts of Trypho and Respicius, as they stand, have been much worked up by late hands; nevertheless they are based upon ancient materials, and there is nothing improbable in the story which follows.

Trypho and Respicius were Christians of the town of Apamea, in Bithynia. The irenarch, or head of the police, in their town, who had been bidden to bring the Christians in to comply with the edict of Decius, conveyed them to Nicæa—where afterwards the famous Council under Constantine was held—to be tried by the supreme authority of the province. They were told that they must choose between sacrificing to the gods and being burned alive. They said that to be burned alive for Christ was a privilege of which they desired to be worthy, and urged the magistrate to do the duty imposed upon him by the edict. "Sacrifice," said the magistrate: "I see that you are of full age, and have a good understanding." "Ah," cried Tryphon, "in our Lord Jesus Christ we have indeed a good understanding. Our desire is to apply it in such a way that we may go through with our conflict to the end."

At the command to apply torture to them they threw off their clothes, and offered themselves freely

<sup>1</sup> Ruinart, p. 134.



to their executioners. For three hours they maintained their cause. The judge, who did not wish them to be killed if he could help it, sent them back to prison. It was a well-known practice of Roman governors, when they wished to compel prisoners to be compliant, to take them in their train from place to place, loaded with chains and fetters. The governor of Bithynia was going on a hunting expedition, and he forced these two Christians to accompany him. It was bitter winter weather, and the ground was frozen hard, and the feet of Respicius and Trypho were covered with open chilblains. When the expedition was over, they were again examined. "Will you be corrected for the future?" asked the magistrate. "We correct ourselves every day before the Lord," answered Trypho,—*"the Lord, whom we serve without ceasing."* "Let them be taken back to prison," said the magistrate, "and have time to give one another good advice, so that they may put away this nonsense and follow the emperor's commands."

He went away again for some days, and on his return to Nicæa addressed them kindly and asked them what resolution they had come to. They answered that they adhered to their former decision, and would not give up their faith. "Have compassion upon yourselves," he said, "and sacrifice to the great gods. I think I see in you signs that you are learning wisdom." It was in vain. Kind language could not win them. "The best compassion that we can show to ourselves," Respicius answered, "is to confess unwaveringly our Lord Jesus Christ, the true Judge, who shall come to try the deeds of all men." The magistrate ordered nails to be run through their feet, and in this condition they were made to walk through the

wintry streets of the town ; but the men maintained that the nails had only pierced their shoes, and not their flesh. The magistrate, astonished at their perseverance, had their hands tied behind their backs and caused them to be thrashed till those who inflicted the thrashing were exhausted. The claw and the torches followed, but without effect. At last the judge said again, "Leave this folly ; think what is good for men of your time of life." Respicius answered that they would never bow down to stocks and stones, because they served the true God, and Him only. "As we have such a Lord," he said, "no pains can ever separate us from His love."

He gave them one more day, and when next morning they still refused to worship any but the living God who is in heaven, he ordered them to be beaten with loaded thongs. At length, after consultation with his assessors, he read out his final judgment : "These Phrygian youths, who are Christians, and refuse to obey the imperial commands, are sentenced to be beheaded." The martyrs were led to the place of execution, and lifting up their hands they cried to the Lord Jesus Christ to receive their souls, and to set them in the bosom of the patriarchs, and so submitted to the penalty which had been pronounced upon them.<sup>1</sup>

In the time of Decius, Nestor was Bishop of Perga, the chief city of Pamphylia, where St. Paul landed from Cyprus on his first missionary journey. Although the Acts of Nestor appear to have been cast into the form of an edifying romance in the fourth century, it is still possible to see in them historical materials of an interesting kind.

<sup>1</sup> Ruinart, p. 138.

The governor of the province of Lycia and Pamphylia, whose name is given as Epolius, was at the town of Sida, when he felt called upon to take action against Nestor. An irenarch was despatched with an escort to fetch him in chains from Perga. On his appearing, Epolius asked him if he was Nestor, the teacher of the Christian religion. The bishop replied, "If you have already learned about me, you need ask no questions, but do with me what you think right. If you ask for the sake of information, I will tell you that I am the teacher and guide of the Christians at Perga." Epolius urged him to leave that vain religion and turn to the immortal gods. Nestor answered, "You may inflict every kind of torture upon my body, and throw me to the fire or for food to the wild beasts, but I will never deny the name of Christ, which is above every name. Who would be so senseless and so little master of his own mind as to turn from the God who created all things, and offer sacrifice to wicked devils and to unconscious images?" "Do you teach then," the governor argued, "that the world was made by the Crucified One?" The argument seemed to the governor unanswerable; but Nestor answered with the full confession of his faith. It has perhaps been amplified by the hands which have edited it, but no doubt it was substantially as follows: "The co-eternal Son and Word of God, who sits upon His Father's throne, beheld the infatuation of you Greeks for the creatures around you, and your misguided devotion to images which cannot help nor profit, and had divine compassion for the work of His own hands. He would have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth; but since it was impossible for men to look upon His Godhead without a medium,

it pleased Him to live among men under a veil, and to teach them a way of salvation through suffering. Therefore, by the will of God His Father, and with the co-operation of the Holy Spirit, He assumed our flesh from the holy Virgin Mary, and by means of it He lived among men." Nestor went on to speak of the miracles which testified to the divine nature of the Incarnate Son, and which proved that His crucifixion was the outcome of His own free will, and not the sentence of the law upon a malefactor. "If," he concluded, "it had not been His voluntary act to surrender His flesh to the infuriated Jews to be crucified, we Christians should not be enabled to despise the torments which you think fit to visit us with."

When he ceased, the governor said, "You have presumed upon my self-restraint and courtesy to prolong your unmeaning talk. Now leave this vain hope, and come and sacrifice, that your life may not end abruptly and in sorrow." "I have already told you," said Nestor, "that you have my free leave to do with me what you think proper. Bodily pains shall not move me away from the faith of the true God, my Saviour."

"Hang this piece of adamant upon the wood," was the governor's reply, "and let him be well scraped and currycombed." The order was executed, but Nestor did not utter a word. Epolius bade them leave him hanging, and said to him, "Tell me in one word, and without any false shame, what your mind is. Will you be with us, or with your Christ?" The bishop answered, "With my Christ I am, and always was, and always will be." Epolius ordered him to be taken to the field outside the town, and there fastened by means

of nails through all his joints, and left with a guard of soldiers to die a lingering death. For many hours, it is said, he hung there before death released him, exhorting the Christians who came near him to persevere in their confession of Him who suffered for them.<sup>1</sup>

The Acts of Conon belong to the same class as those of Nestor. Conon was an inhabitant of Magydus, another town of Pamphylia, where he worked as a gardener upon an imperial estate, called Carmena. He was advanced in years. The governor came to Magydus to enforce the edict, and summoned the population by voice of crier to sacrifice. Magydus had become so predominantly Christian that, if we may believe the account, the town was practically deserted; the inhabitants, hearing what was to be demanded of them, left their homes and their chattels, and fled.

Two zealous pagans of the place obtained permission to search for Christians in what they thought to be likely quarters, and came upon the unsuspecting Conon watering his plants. They hailed him in a friendly manner, and he returned the salutation. They told him that the governor wanted him. "Why," said the old man, "what can he want with me, a stranger and, above all, a Christian? If he chooses to look for his own likes, let him look, and not send for a tiller of the ground, who goes to his work day by day." At this avowal of his faith, they lashed him to a horse, and conveyed him to the governor. Conon made no complaint or remonstrance. "Our hunting was not in vain," said one of his captors to another; "this man will have to answer for all the other Christians."

When the governor—presumably Epolius—asked

<sup>1</sup> *Acta Sanctorum*, February, vol. iii. p. 629.



him the usual questions about his name, origin, and position, Conon replied that he belonged to Nazareth in Galilee, that he was akin to Christ, whom he served from his forefathers, and whom he knew as God over all things. Probably his answer was intended to bear an allegorical, and not a literal sense. The governor answered, "If you know Christ, then know our gods also. Be guided by me, and, by all the gods, you shall gain high honours for it. I do not bid you sacrifice : it will be enough to take a pinch of incense, and a drop of wine, and an olive branch, and say, 'O most high Zeus, save this people.' Say that, and I lay nothing more upon you. Take my advice, and quit that infamous religion. Why are you so misguided as to deify a man, and a man who died a criminal's death ? I have learned all about it from the Jews,—about His family, and what He did among His own nation, and how He died by crucifixion. They brought me the memoirs of Him and read them to me. Leave off this folly, therefore, and enjoy life along with us." Conon expressed a Christian's horror at such language, and his determination to abide by his convictions. Threats of tortures and of dreadful forms of death followed ; but Conon was not to be shaken by threats. He said that none of those things could hurt him, because he had God on his side to strengthen him.

The governor conferred with his council, and then ordered nails or spits to be run through the old man's feet, and obliged him to go in that condition in front of his carriage, while two men drove him along with whips. When they got near the forum, Conon could go no further. He fell on his knees, and offered his prayer ; then made the sign of the cross, and expired.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Von Gebhardt's *Ausgewählte Märtyreracten*, p. 129.

A less tragic end crowned the confession of a Christian named Achatius, who is thought to have belonged to an adjoining province.

"You ought to love our sovereigns," the governor said to him, "seeing that you enjoy the advantages of the Roman laws." "Who is there," replied Achatius, "that loves the emperor as much as the Christians do? We pray for him constantly, from year's end to year's end, that he may live long, may govern his subject peoples with justice, and may have peace throughout his reign. We pray also for the preservation of his armies, and for the good estate of the wide world." "I am glad that you do," said the governor, whose name is said to have been Marcian; "but in order that the emperor may the better recognise your loyalty, join us in offering a sacrifice to him." "I pray to my Lord, who is great and true, for the health of the emperor; but I may not sacrifice to the emperor, and he ought never to demand it. Who would think of sacrificing to a human being?" "Answer me: to what god do you pray? We too will sacrifice to him." "I wish indeed that you knew my God to your benefit, and that you would acknowledge the God who is the true God." "Tell me his name," said Marcian. To a similar request other Christians refused outright; they knew that the name of God could only be learned by Christian experience. Achatius took a different line. Perhaps to stimulate further inquiry, he caught up a title from the Old Testament. "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," he said. In Greek and Latin, where the "of" is not expressed, it would sound to an uninstructed ear like "The God Abraham, the God Isaac, the God Jacob." "Are those the names of gods?" asked the puzzled magistrate.

"Not they," Achatius replied, "but He who spake to them; He is the true God. He it is that ought to be feared." "Who is that?" asked Marcian. Achatius mystified him still further. "The Most High," he answered; "Adonai, who rideth upon the Cherubim and Seraphim." "What does Seraphim mean?" "A servant of the Most High God, and a priest of the throne that is lifted up."

Marcian had no desire to hear more of that kind of thing. "What philosophy has imposed upon you with its vain dogmas?" he said. "Pay no heed to what you cannot see. Acknowledge these real gods before your eyes." "What gods do you wish me to sacrifice to?" asked the Christian. "To Apollo," was the reply, "Apollo our preserver, who drives away famine and pestilence, and keeps and guides the universe." The reply was an invective against the gods of the heathen mythology. "Sacrifice or die," said the governor. "That is what the Dalmatian highwaymen say," replied the bold prisoner; "they give the traveller that choice, — 'Your money or your life.' No one that they catch asks what is fair and reasonable, but only what force his captor can command. It is the same with you. You tell us that we must either do what is wrong, or perish. Justice punishes crimes. If I have been guilty of any such, I condemn my own self without waiting for your sentence; but if I am led to punishment for worshipping the true God, then it is not law that condemns me, but the arbitrary will of a judge." Marcian answered, "My commission is to enforce the edict. If, therefore, you show contempt, you must prepare for certain punishment." "And I am commanded," the Christian answered, "never to deny my God. If you serve a frail man of flesh, who must soon

depart from this world and be food for worms, how much more ought I to obey the most mighty God, whose power endureth for ever? He has Himself said, 'Whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.' "

"There," said Marcian, "I always wanted to know that. You have just confessed the mistake of your persuasion and of your law. God has a Son, then?" "Yes." "What is God's Son?" "The Word of truth and grace." "Is that His name?" "You did not ask me His name, but about His powers." "Tell me His name." "He is called Jesus Christ." Marcian thought that the Christian, in spite of his mystical phrases, was entangled in as gross a mythology as his own. "Who was God's wife?" he asked; "who bore Him this Son?" It was not difficult for Achatius to point out that the processes of earthly birth are far from the Christian ideas of the Godhead; but referring to his version of the Psalm, "My heart is inditing of a good matter," which in the Septuagint and the Latin runs, "My heart hath brought forth a good word," he told the governor that the Son of God, the Word of truth, was produced "from the heart of God." The phrase was taken up at once. "God has a body, then?" said the governor. Achatius answered, "He alone knows. We have no knowledge of invisible form; we can only reverence His power and might." "If God has no body," said Marcian, "He cannot have a heart. There is no such thing as perception without organs." Achatius answered, "Wisdom is not a product of bodily organs; it is the gift of God. A body is not necessary to thought."

The magistrate returned to safer ground. "Look at the Cataphrygians now." This was a name for the

Montanist sect of Christians, which took its rise in Phrygia, not very far from the scene of this discussion. "Their religion is an ancient one, but they have given it up and come over to my form of worship, and join us in paying vows to the gods. Do you the like, and obey without loss of time." Probably the governor's assertion with regard to the apostasy of the poor Cataphrygians had very little foundation in fact; Marcian's language showed that he had no real knowledge of their history. But he hoped that the argument from their pretended example might have some effect. "Gather together the Christians of the Catholic law," he went on, "and make them observe the religion of our emperor. Let all your people come with you; they will do what you tell them." Achatius answered: "It is not my fancies that govern them all, but the commandments of God. If I persuade them to do what is right they will hear me, but if the opposite they will despise me." "Give me the names of them all," said the governor. Achatius answered: "Their names are written in the heavenly book and in the pages of God. It is not for mortal eyes to behold what has been inscribed by the immortal and invisible power of God." Marcian took another sudden turn. "Where are those magicians, your fellow-craftsmen, or your teachers in this juggling imposture?" "All that we know," answered the Christian, "we owe to God; we have the utmost horror of magic and its professors." "To introduce a new-fangled kind of religion as you do," said Marcian, "is nothing else but magic." "Our aim," replied Achatius, "is to destroy what you first make, and then when you have made it, you are afraid of it. You would have no gods if the workmen were short of stone, or the stone could not find a workman.



We, for our part, fear Him who fashioned us, not one who was fashioned by ourselves. He created us, as Lord; He loved us, as our Father; and, as a good patron, He delivered us from eternal death."

"Give me the names," said Marcian, "or you will fall under the penalty yourself." "It is I who stand at your tribunal," Achatius answered. "Do you ask my name? Or do you suppose that, if you had a number of prisoners before you, you could get the better of them, when one man is more than a match for you? If you want names, I am called Achatius. My real name is Agathangelus. Piso is the Bishop of Troy, and Menander is a presbyter. Do what you like."

The narrative as it has reached us relates that Marcian remanded Achatius back to prison, and sent the notes of the trial to the emperor Decius himself; that Decius smiled when he read them, restored Achatius to liberty, and promoted Marcian to a more important province. This account is not very probable; but it may well be that the governor delayed to condemn Achatius, and that the death of Decius, which occurred shortly after, made it safe to release him.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ruinart, p. 129; Von Gebhardt, *Ausgew. Märtyreracten*, p. 115.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CYPRIAN

THE Latin-speaking world was not much behind the Greek in the number of its martyrs and confessors in the reign of Decius ; but less is known about them in detail.

The first in order of importance, and perhaps the first in time, was the Bishop of Rome himself. Fabian had governed the Roman church for the unusually long space of fourteen years, and within that time had seen emperor after emperor perish by violent deaths, so that his own seat must have seemed to him safe in comparison with theirs. He had distinguished himself by the care with which he had organised the church committed to him, dividing the city into districts, which were severally assigned to the seven deacons of Rome, and making many constructions in the cemeteries which formed so important a part of Christian life at Rome in those days. The office of Bishop of Rome, which Fabian himself did much to raise, was already a great office in the time of Decius. The successor of Fabian tells a correspondent that he had under him six and forty presbyters, seven deacons and seven subdeacons, forty-two acolytes, fifty-two readers and exorcists, together with the doorkeepers, and a list of more than fifteen hundred widows and afflicted persons dependent upon the church. Cyprian says that Decius would rather have seen a rival emperor start up than

a bishop elected to take the place of the martyred Fabian. Unhappily the manner of his martyrdom is unknown, but a letter of Cyprian's remains, in which he thanks the presbyters of Rome for the missive in which they had informed him of the "glorious departure" of "my excellent colleague." "I rejoiced greatly," says the saint, "that his blameless ministry attained so noble a consummation."<sup>1</sup>

For more than a year the government of the church at Rome remained in the hands of the council of its presbyters. A letter which they wrote to the church of Carthage expresses their views of duty in the time of danger. "You may learn from many who go from us to you that we have acted and are acting with all diligence, having the fear of God before our eyes more than worldly dangers, and the penalties of eternity rather than the fear of men and the fleeting injuries which they inflict. We do not desert the brotherhood, but exhort them to stand fast in the faith, and to be ready to go with the Lord. We called back those who went up to do what they were compelled to do. The church," they continue, "stands courageously in the faith, although some fell through fear, and through fear only—whether because they were distinguished personages or because they were seized by the fear of men. These have been removed from communion with us, but we have not left them to themselves, but have exhorted and still continue to exhort them to repent, if by any means they may find pardon from Him who alone can grant it, fearing that if abandoned by us, they should fall still lower."<sup>2</sup>

Although at Rome, as at Alexandria, there were many who fell away, especially in the upper classes,

<sup>1</sup> Cyprian, *Epist.* ix.

<sup>2</sup> Cyprian, *Epist.* viii.

there were many others who were made of better stuff. Two presbyters, Moses and Maximus, and two deacons, Nicostratus and Rufinus, with four laymen, were among the foremost. Though Decius was himself at Rome, there was no haste in enforcing the edict against Christianity in its severest penalties. These four confessors, at least, lay in prison for many a long day, eagerly desiring martyrdom but not obtaining it. After a confinement of eleven months, Moses expired in his prison. His constitution, always feeble, was exhausted by the rigours of his place of confinement and of the winter which he passed in it. The others, who kept up an animated correspondence with Cyprian in Africa, appear to have survived the persecution. "The very delay of your martyrdom," wrote the impassioned saint, "elevates you to yet greater heights, and the length of time, so far from detracting from your glory, does but enhance it. A first, a single confession is enough to make a saint; but you repeat your confession every time that you are invited to quit your prison, and prefer your prison to the loss of faith and virtue. Each day adds to you a new distinction. Your deserts grow greater with each month as it rolls over you. The man who suffers outright gains but one victory, but he who remains under constant inflictions, and meets pain without being conquered, receives a daily crown."<sup>1</sup>

Amongst the companions of Moses and Maximus was one whose history, as worked out by Archbishop Benson,<sup>2</sup> is full of interest. Celerinus was a native of Carthage, who lived in Rome. He came of a family of martyrs. His grandmother, Celerina, had died a martyr's death in some earlier persecution; so had

<sup>1</sup> Cyprian, *Epist.* xxxvii.

<sup>2</sup> Benson's *Cyprian*, p. 69 foll.

two uncles, Laurentinus and Egnatius, both soldiers in the Roman army. At the time of Fabian's death, Celerinus had been tortured. The emperor Decius himself was present at the trial, and expressed his astonishment at the man's powers of endurance. A Carthaginian friend of Celerinus, "Lucian, a man of humble birth and small reading, congratulates him in a misspelt, ungrammatical letter" on having by God's will prevailed over "the arch-serpent himself, the forerunner of Antichrist." He had, so Lucian says, not merely confessed Christ, but had intimidated the persecutor by his utterances and by his quotations from the Bible, of which he was a "lively student." Cyprian writes of him while Celerinus was still alive :

"He was the first to enter the present battle. He was the standard-bearer of the soldiers of Christ. Amidst the excitement of the beginning of the persecution he was confronted with the very mover and source of the onslaught. Nothing could shake his determination ; and by conquering his adversary he made a way for others after him to conquer. His was no victory gained quickly by a wound or two, but the more wonderful triumph of a protracted conflict with incessant and persistent pains. For nineteen whole days in his prison he lay in the thongs and iron of the stocks. His flesh was emaciated by hunger and thirst. His illustrious body shines with the glorious seals of his wounds. The impress and token of what he went through stands out and compels attention in the muscles and limbs which wasted away in his long privations."

Not all the family of Celerinus, however, were as consistent as himself. One sister, called Candida, certainly sacrificed—so he told his friend Lucian—



“and provoked the Lord to anger.” The guilt of another, who bore the name of Tecusa, was not so great, or not so clear. As far as Celerinus could make out, she went some distance up the Capitol to sacrifice, but on reaching the spot known as the Three Fates, she found some officer who consented to receive presents from her to certify that she had sacrificed when she had not, and so came home. Both sisters were put out of communion, and then, full of remorse for what they had done, devoted themselves to relieving the wants of the Christian refugees at Rome, whom they met on their landing at Portus, and maintained them in their destitution. No fewer than sixty-five such refugees from Carthage alone were at one moment dependent upon their bounty. Celerinus appealed to Lucian to aid him in gaining their restoration to the communion of the Church.

The names of many other confessors and martyrs both at Rome and throughout Italy are known, but their true history is lost. That the persecution was felt in Gaul is certain, but the history of only one martyr of that country is preserved, and that in no trustworthy form. It is the history of Saturninus, the Bishop of Toulouse, who fell a victim—as so many did at Alexandria—to the fury of a heathen populace, not to the legal cruelties of a magistrate. A bull had been brought to the altar for sacrifice, when the idea occurred to some one to lash the Christian to the animal and drive it down the steep and stony street. The thing was done, and the bishop’s brains were dashed out upon the stones.<sup>1</sup>

No Spanish martyrdoms of this period are recorded; but the correspondence of Cyprian contains

<sup>1</sup> Ruinart, p. 109.

the names of two unhappy bishops—the Bishops of Leon and Merida, who fell away from Christ. Both of them obtained certificates of having sacrificed. Basilides of Leon fell sick, and confessed afterwards that in his despair and misery he had blasphemed God. Martial of Merida had for a long time been on the borderland of heathenism. He was a member of a pagan burial guild, and was in the habit of attending the guild banquets, and, Christian bishop though he was, when some of his children died, he had them buried in the cemetery of his guild, with rites other than those of Christianity. It was only natural that such a man, when the edict of Decius was published, should have hastened to put himself under the shelter of the law. He publicly sought and obtained an official document stating that he had performed the idolatrous rite and had denied Christ.

The subsequent history of the two men is not uninteresting. Basilides abdicated his see ; the apostasy of Martial was so evident that no further abdication was necessary. New bishops were duly appointed in their places. But when peace was restored, Basilides repaired to Rome, and persuaded Stephen, who was then the bishop there, to recognise him and Martial as the rightful Bishops of Leon and of Merida. From the decision of Rome the churches of Leon and Merida appealed to Carthage, and Cyprian, as was natural, with a council of thirty-seven bishops, assured the Spanish churches that the decision of Stephen, who lived a long way off and was ignorant of the facts, was of no value, and that the claim of Basilides and Martial was absurd.<sup>1</sup>

The church of Africa had its full share in the

<sup>1</sup> Cyprian, *Epist.* lxvii.

sufferings inflicted by Decius. The leading spirit of that church in the middle of the third century was Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage.

He was a rich man, and well known in Carthaginian society, before his conversion to Christianity. Only two years elapsed between his conversion and his elevation to what was then, next after Rome, the chief bishopric of Western Christendom. He had not been bishop for two years, when the persecution of Decius began.

At the first approach of the persecution, Cyprian, like other great and wise prelates of the time, retired from Carthage. Cyprian knew that his presence in the city was dangerous for his fellow Christians, as well as for himself, and he believed that it was of the highest importance at the moment that he should live to watch over the interests of his flock. The heathen populace demanded that he should be thrown to the lion. He made over his large property to trustees, for the purpose of helping the afflicted members of the Church. The proconsul, not being able to find him, issued a proscription of his trustees, in which his full title was given him—"Caecilius Cyprianus, the Bishop of the Christians." Many Christians, both of his own province and at a distance, criticised his conduct in leaving Carthage at such a moment. The Roman presbyters, in particular, who after the martyrdom of Fabian directed the church at Rome, wrote to their brethren at Carthage, to draw the contrast between their own brave bishop and the hireling shepherds who flee at the approach of danger. But they little knew the man of whom they were writing. From his hiding-place, where he lived a life of prayer and meditation and daily Communion, he kept up regular correspondence with the leaders of

the flock at Carthage, and animated the confessors not only there, but in many parts of the world, by his vigorous exhortations and encouragements; and humanly speaking it was only through the wisdom of Cyprian that, when the persecution of Decius came to an end, the Church was guided to a right decision on the grave questions which arose in consequence of it.

When the edict of Decius arrived at Carthage, "some," says Archbishop Benson, "were dragged before the magistrates, and some maltreated by the populace. The numbers who suffered were possibly not great, but their sufferings were intense. The edict prescribed confiscation, banishment, mine-labour, imprisonment with starvation as penalties, and torture as the means of inquisition. In each town five commissioners were associated with the magistrates. The tortures were not used until the arrival of the proconsul in April (A.D. 250). He found the severities so much abated that some of the exiles had returned, but after presiding over this tribunal in the capital, he made a tour of the province, with his twelve dreaded fasces, exercising such rigour that some conspicuous confessors yielded, while others died under his engines. . . .

"There were many who instantly sacrificed property and citizenship by voluntary exile: many who sought hiding in the crowds of Rome. The first inmates of the prison at Carthage were a presbyter Rogatian, 'a glorious old man,' who had been left by Cyprian, during his absence, trustee of his charities, and a 'quiet sober-minded man,' by name Felicissimus. These were dragged thither by the multitude. Regular committals soon swelled the number. Women and even lads were imprisoned, who had met with equal

defiance the threats and the kindly persuasions of the magistrates. They declined to taste the sacrificial victim, or sprinkle the incense, or to put on the liturgic veil. Two terrible cells were assigned to them where hunger, thirst, and intense heat soon did their work. After a short time fifteen persons had perished there, of whom four were women, besides one in the quarry, and two under torture. Mappalicus"—a heroic name in the traditions of the African church—"was one of the latter. His limbs and sides streaming from repeated blows of the torture-claw, he said to the proconsul as he was remanded to the cell, 'To-morrow you shall see a contest indeed.' Next day he was tortured again and died.

"Some scenes were yet more dreadful. Maidens" were made to suffer horrors worse than death. "Subordinates were allowed to invent new tortures. Numidicus, a presbyter of the neighbourhood, prepared many for death, and then with his wife was tortured by fire. The wife was actually burnt alive, and he was left for dead, a shower of stones having been hurled upon him at the stake. His daughter found him breathing still; he was revived, and afterwards enrolled in the presbyterate of the capital.

"Many were after double torture dismissed, some into banishment, some to bear the brand for life, as a second 'seal in their foreheads,' some to resume former occupations, beggared of all they possessed. Some quailed and fell, who on second thoughts returned to avow their faith, forfeit their all, and undergo their torture. Bona was dragged by her husband to the altar, there to justify her reappearance from abroad; but exclaiming, 'The act is not mine but yours,' as the incense fell from her hand, she was exiled again. No martyrs were



more honoured than Castus and Aemilius, who for such recantation were burnt to death.”<sup>1</sup>

Cyprian, from his place of refuge, urged upon his clergy the duty of ministering to the bodily wants of the confessors in prison. He was anxious that no less honour should be shown to the bodies of those who died in prison, even if they had undergone no tortures, than to those of the men who were actually put to death for their faith. There were no truer martyrs than they. In particular, he ordered careful note to be made of the days on which the prisoners passed away, that they might be commemorated like other martyrs when their days came round. It gave him great satisfaction to receive information on the point from time to time. “We celebrate oblations and sacrifices here in remembrance of them,” he says, “and hope soon to celebrate them with you, by the Lord’s protection.”<sup>2</sup>

At Carthage, as elsewhere, the anti-Christian movement set on foot by Decius died down before a year had gone by. Decius fell in the war against the Goths in November 251, and for another year and a half the government passed into the weak hands of Gallus. The appalling plague which swept over the empire in his reign gave the Christians an opportunity of doing good which they were not slow to use; but it woke against them the old cries of angered heathenism. Cyprian himself had visions which warned him that troubles were at hand, which would surpass all that had yet been experienced. But these troubles were not to come so soon as he expected, either in Africa or elsewhere. Two Bishops of Rome in succession—Cornelius and Lucius—were banished from the city,

<sup>1</sup> Benson’s *Cyprian*, p. 75 foll.

<sup>2</sup> Cyprian, *Epist.* xii.

the former of whom died in exile, and was reckoned among the martyrs; previous legislation against the Church remained unrepealed, and there is reason to think that fresh legislation in the same direction took place; but no executions for Christianity occurred under Gallus.

The stern and able Valerian, who had held the revived office of censor under Decius, became emperor in the year 253. In the year 257 he took up again the war against the Christians, whom at the outset of his reign he had befriended.

It seems to have been his intention at the first to shed no blood in putting Christianity down. The edict ordered that the bishops and leading ministers of the Church should be sent into perpetual banishment. Gatherings of Christians were prohibited, and they were forbidden access to their burial-grounds.

It was the 30th of August 257 when Cyprian was brought before Paternus, the proconsul of Africa, in accordance with the edict. The examination took place in the *secretarium*, or private office of the proconsul. Paternus began, "The sacred emperors, Valerian and Gallienus, have been pleased to send me a letter, in which they direct that persons who do not follow the religion of Rome are to be made to conform to the Roman ceremonies. I have accordingly made inquiries concerning yourself. What answer have you to give me?" Cyprian answered, "I am a Christian and a bishop. I know no other gods but the one true God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all things that are therein. This is the God whom we Christians serve. To Him we pray day and night, for ourselves and for all men, and for the safety of the emperors themselves." "Do you intend to continue

in that mind?" "A good mind, which knows God, cannot alter." The proconsul caught somewhat scornfully at Cyprian's "cannot." "Can you, then," he asked, "in accordance with the directions of Valerian and Gallienus, set out as an exile for the town of Curubis?" Cyprian answered, "I will set out."

There was another question which the proconsul wished to ask. "They have been pleased to write to me about the presbyters, as well as the bishops. I should be glad, therefore, if you would tell me who are the presbyters residing in this city." Cyprian had been a lawyer before his conversion, and he replied, "It is an excellent and useful regulation of your own laws that informers should not be allowed. I cannot therefore detect and delate them; but they will be found in their respective cities." The proconsul said, "I shall make inquiries here to-day." Perhaps he was not disinclined to give the presbyters warning to make their escape. Cyprian replied, "Our rules forbid any one to offer himself of his own accord, and your own opinion is against it; so they cannot offer themselves, but you will find them if you make inquiry for them." "I shall find them," said Paternus; and he added, "They have also directed that no assemblies are to be held anywhere, and no cemeteries are to be entered. If any one disobeys this wholesome direction, he will suffer capital punishment." The reply of Cyprian was only, "Do as you have been directed."<sup>1</sup>

Copies of this examination were circulated by Cyprian's own orders among the churches of Africa, and we still possess a letter in which some of his fellow-bishops, who were in penal servitude in the mines, return thanks for the copy sent to them.

<sup>1</sup> Hartel's *Cyprian*, part iii., p. 90 foll.

"Like a good and true teacher," they say, "you have clearly signified, in the Proconsular Acts, what we, your disciples, should say after you when examined by the governor."<sup>1</sup>

Paternus had no wish to deal harshly with the distinguished culprit. He gave him time to make his arrangements, and on the 14th of September Cyprian took up his abode at the not unpleasant spot, some fifty miles from Carthage, which had been assigned to him as his place of exile. The Christian inhabitants of Curubis received him with affection and supplied his wants.

On the night of his arrival at Curubis, he had one of those visions which meant so much for the Christians of Africa.

"There appeared to me," so he told his biographer, who was a voluntary companion of his exile, "before I fell asleep, a young man of superhuman stature, who led me to the Praetorium. I thought that I was brought to the tribunal, where the proconsul was sitting. As soon as he saw me, the proconsul began to write down my sentence upon his tablet, but I was ignorant of the nature of it, for he had not put the usual questions to me. The young man, however, who stood behind him, read with great attention whatever was written down; and being unable, where he was, to tell me in so many words, he indicated what the writing on the tablet meant by expressive gestures. Spreading out his hand flat like the blade of a sword, he imitated the executioner's stroke, and conveyed his meaning as clearly as words could have done. I understood that I was to suffer. I began at once to beg and pray for a respite, if it were only for one day, till I could put

<sup>1</sup> Cyprian, *Epist.* lxxvii.

my affairs in proper order. After I had repeated my petition many times, the proconsul again began to write something on the tablet. I did not know what it was, but I felt sure, from the calmness of the judge's face, that he thought my request reasonable, and was moved by it. The young man also, who had already disclosed by his unspoken gesture that I was to suffer, now again hastened to make secret signs to me, and, twisting his fingers one behind another, conveyed to me that the reprieve till the morrow, for which I had asked, was granted. Although the sentence had not been read out, I came to myself with a very joyful heart at the pleasure of receiving the reprieve ; and yet the uncertainty of the interpretation made me tremble so with fear, that my bounding heart still throbbed with dread all over at the remains of the terror."<sup>1</sup>

Exactly that day year the death sentence was pronounced upon Cyprian.

It is not known whether Paternus carried out his threat of finding the priests of the diocese of Carthage ; but his neighbour the governor of Numidia took vigorous steps to carry out the requirements of the edict. Nine bishops of that province wrote to Cyprian from the mines where they were forced to labour in chains and fetters. With them were associated presbyters and lay folk, old men and virgins, and young boys. They had been beaten ignominiously with rods,—a punishment which was only applied to persons of low rank. They worked in the dark, half-starved, ill-clothed, half choked with the smell of the smelting furnaces, with their foreheads branded and the hair of one half of their heads shaven off. They missed their accustomed baths ; they missed immeasurably more their privilege

<sup>1</sup> *Vita Cypriani*, 12.



of celebrating and receiving the Blessed Sacrament. The letters with which Cyprian cheered them were not the only comfort which they owed to him. His subdeacon Herennianus, with three acolytes, carried them the money which supplied their necessities.<sup>1</sup>

Suddenly in the July of the year 258, a change came over the situation. Galerius Maximus, who had succeeded Paternus as proconsul of Africa, recalled Cyprian from his exile. There were reasons why the authorities wished to have him close at hand. He returned, and "by the sacred directions" of the proconsul took up his abode in his own "Gardens." Soon after his conversion he had sold his beautiful country house and grounds near Carthage for the benefit of the poor, but his friends had bought the place back and presented it to him again. There Cyprian remained, expecting and hoping every day that he would be sent for.

The cause of this summons was a new decree of Valerian. Its appalling contents are to be seen in the letter which Cyprian wrote to Successus, Bishop of Abbir Germaniciana, to be made known to the other bishops.

"The reason why I did not write to you at once, dear brother, is that none of the clergy could leave Carthage at the moment when the conflict began. All were prepared to win the glory of God and of heaven by the laying down of their lives.

"I must now tell you of the arrival of the messengers whom I despatched to Rome for the purpose of ascertaining and informing us what had really been contained in the rescript with regard to us; because currency had been given to many conflicting opinions, destitute of any real foundation.

<sup>1</sup> Cyprian, *Epist.* lxxvi, lxxvii.

"The facts are these. Valerian has sent a rescript to the senate, that bishops, priests, and deacons are to be executed at once ; senators, and men of distinction, and knights of Rome, to forfeit their dignity, and be stripped of their goods ; and if after the loss of their possessions they persist in being Christians, they are to lose their heads ; married women are to be deprived of their goods and banished ; Caesariani," or lower officials of the emperor's treasury, "who now or at some former time have confessed themselves to be Christians, are to become the property of the treasury, entered upon a list, and sent in chains to work upon the emperor's estates.

"The emperor Valerian added to his address a copy of his circular to the provincial governors with regard to us. Every day we hope to see this circular arrive, standing in the strength of faith to endure the suffering, and looking to the help and the loving-kindness of God for the crown of eternal life.

"You must know that Xystus," the Bishop of Rome, "was executed in his cemetery on the sixth of August, together with four deacons. The magistrates at Rome press forward with this persecution every day, executing those who are brought before them and taking possession of their goods for the treasury."<sup>1</sup>

Such was the new legislation against Christianity. Cyprian had been summoned back to Carthage to be put to death. But for some reason the blow was delayed. Cyprian's friends—many of them heathens of high position—urged him to withdraw from danger, as he had done under Decius, and put safe hiding-places at his disposal. But Cyprian refused to go. The proconsul Galerius was at Utica ; and one day

<sup>1</sup> Cyprian, *Epist.* lxx.

Cyprian's agents informed him that officers had been sent to fetch him to that city. When the officers arrived at the "Gardens," they found the bishop gone. He no longer wished to avoid death; but he would not die at Utica. From his place of retreat he wrote to his flock at Carthage—it is the last of his epistles—to explain to them his intentions. He said that the proper place for a bishop to die in was his own city. As soon as the proconsul returned to Carthage, he too would return, but not before. It would, he said, be derogatory to the dignity of the glorious church of Carthage if its bishop were to suffer a martyr's death elsewhere. Those last utterances, in which, according to the promise of Christ, the Holy Ghost might be expected to reveal His inspiration, ought to be delivered amongst the people whom the bishop represented. Meanwhile they were to keep free from excitement and disorder, and no Christian was to come forward and offer himself to the magistrates unsought.

Galerius came to Carthage, and Cyprian, true to his word, was there likewise. On the 13th of September Galerius, determined that Cyprian should not escape again, sent a surprise party to the house. It consisted of two high officers of the proconsul's staff, with a detachment of soldiers. They lifted Cyprian into a carriage, and set him in the midst between them, and drove him to the house of Sextus, where the proconsul was staying for the benefit of his health. The faithful deacon who had accompanied Cyprian into exile relates how alert and merry his master looked as he drove away to what he supposed would be instant martyrdom.

The end, however, was not to be quite so soon. Galerius was too ill that morning to deal with the case, and, as if in fulfilment of Cyprian's vision at Curubis, he

remanded the illustrious prisoner till the following day. The bishop was conducted to the house of the aide-de-camp (as he might be called) who had brought him to Galerius, and there he spent his last night, provided with every comfort, and conversing freely with his friends, among whom was his biographer, Pontius. Meanwhile the report passed through the city that Thascius—the name by which Cyprian was best known to the heathen population—had been brought at last before the magistrate. A great crowd assembled near the house where he was quartered. Many heathens were there, and it seemed as if the whole of the Christian church of Carthage was gathered in the street. They were determined that nothing should be done with the bishop without their knowledge. All night long they kept watch at the doors of the house; it was the Vigil of the saint's Passion. Cyprian was told how the people were spending the hours, and sent them out a message to see that the maidens were kept from harm.

At last "the morrow" dawned. It was a brilliant morning. Cyprian left the lodgings of the aide-de-camp. His way lay across the *stadium*; or race-course. Those who went with him thought of the way in which the Apostle compared trials like those of their master to the feats of the training-ground. He was attended by a whole army of the faithful, who advanced, says Pontius, "as if they were going to take death by storm."

They reached the house of Sextus. The proconsul, in his desire to give publicity to the trial of Cyprian, had actually summoned the populace to the spot. The ailing man was not yet ready to leave his room when they arrived, and Cyprian was shown into a private apartment to sit down. It was observed that the seat

happened to be spread with a linen cloth. It was the custom to deck the thrones of bishops in the church in that manner. Cyprian was heated with his long walk, so that his clothes were wet with perspiration. An official, who had once been a Christian but had fallen away, offered him a set of dry garments ; but Cyprian answered that perhaps the complaint would not last out the day, and remedies were therefore unnecessary.

Suddenly the proconsul called for him. He was ushered in and placed in the dock. "Are you Thascius Cyprianus?" asked Galerius. He said, "I am." Galerius had heard a word or two of the language which Christians spoke among themselves. He had picked up the word *papa*, or "pope"—the word of filial affection applied to bishops. "You have allowed men of sacrilegious opinions," he said, "to make you their pope." The proconsul used the word "sacrilegious" in its legal and technical sense, which included all resistance to what were considered the "divine" commandments of the emperor. Cyprian made no objection to the use of the word. He simply answered, "Yes." The implements for offering incense were in readiness in court. "The sacred emperors," said Galerius, "have commanded that you should perform the ceremony." "I shall not do it," was the answer—or perhaps the word means strictly, "I do not offer." The proconsul gave him one more chance. "For your own interests," he said, "consider." "Do as you are directed to do," was the bishop's answer ; "there is nothing to consider where the case is so plain."

It took the proconsul but a moment to confer with his council of assessors, as he was bound to do. It was a mere matter of form. Then he addressed



Cyprian as follows: "You have long lived a life of sacrilege, and have joined with a large number of persons in a criminal conspiracy, and have set yourself up as an enemy to the gods of Rome and the observances of religion. The pious and sacred princes, Valerian the Augustus, Gallienus the Augustus, and Valerian the noble Caesar, have not succeeded in bringing you back to the way of their rites. Therefore, being clearly found to be the ringleader and standard-bearer in crimes of a very bad character, you shall in your own person be made a lesson for those whom you have associated with yourself in your guilt. Your blood shall establish discipline."

Every word seemed afterwards to the Christian bystanders to have had a prophetic import, a divinely inspired second sense, like the words of Caiaphas in the Gospel. The discipline which Cyprian's blood was to establish was the discipline of the church. After this speech the proconsul read his sentence from the tablet in these words: "Our pleasure is that Thascius Cyprianus be executed with the sword." "Thanks be to God," was the response of the bishop.

No sooner was the sentence read than something like an uproar began among the Christians, who were present in immense numbers. Shouts were heard, "Let us also be beheaded with him."

Cyprian came out of the house, guarded by a detachment of soldiers. Centurions and tribunes marched on either side of him. The grounds of the house of Sextus formed a kind of natural amphitheatre, the sides of which were clothed with wood. The trees were filled with sympathising spectators. On reaching the chosen spot, the bishop took off his hooded cloak, and knelt down and prayed. Then he stripped himself

of his "dalmatic"—not at that time a specially ecclesiastical garment—and gave it to the deacons near him, and stood in his linen under-garment, quietly waiting for the executioner, who was not yet come. On his arrival, Cyprian told his friends to give him the handsome gift of five-and-twenty gold pieces. The brethren began to strew the ground in front of him with napkins and handkerchiefs to catch the martyr's blood. He began to fasten a handkerchief round his own eyes, but as he had some difficulty in tying the ends of it, a presbyter named Julian, and a subdeacon bearing the same name, tied it for him. The executioner was slow in his preparations, and Cyprian said something to him to hasten him. Whether it was Cyprian's words, or his munificent gift, or the high position and calm bearing of the martyr, or the circumstances of the execution, the man became nervous, and could scarcely bring his fingers to clasp the handle of his sword. The centurion on duty was compelled to do the work instead of him, and with strength given from on high, as the Christians thought, severed Cyprian's head from his shoulders.

So Cyprian died. He was the first bishop who had met a martyr's death at Carthage or in Africa ; and the death of St. Thomas of Canterbury scarcely had a greater effect upon the history of the Church of England than Cyprian's had upon that of his own country for ages. The heathen populace were eager to gaze upon the body of the great prelate who had done so much for Carthage in the time of the plague, without religious partiality. The Christians, pleased at this tribute of respect, allowed the body to lie all day in a kind of state, hard by the spot where Cyprian had died. At night they came with wax tapers and torches, and bore

it to the burying-ground of Macrobius Candidianus, "with prayers and a mighty triumph."

A few days later Galerius Maximus, the proconsul who had sentenced him, died also.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Vita Cypriani*, and *Acta Proconsularia*, in Hartel's *Cybrian*, part iii., pp. xc and cx.

## CHAPTER IX

### MONTANUS AND FLAVIAN; MARIAN AND JAMES

IT was in the interval between the death of Galerius and the arrival of the new proconsul that the procurator, who governed the province in the meanwhile, lent his countenance to a popular demonstration against the Christians. It was followed up the next day by severe measures on the part of the government. By what they considered to be a collusion of craft with violence, a batch of Christians were taken into custody together. They left to future generations a record of their sufferings, which would be even more affecting than it is, if it were not so evidently saturated with the recollection of the Passion of Perpetua. One of the group, named Donatian, was only a catechumen when he was seized, and he passed away in prison, after being baptized there. Primolus, in like manner, died in prison. A few months before, at a time when he had been called in question for his faith by the authorities, he made his public confession before the judge, and was reckoned, according to the teaching of the African church, to have received the equivalent of baptism.

Instead of being taken at once to prison, the martyrs were at first confined in the houses of some of the district officials. They overheard the soldiers who guarded them say that the governor intended to

burn them alive ; but in answer to their prayers the design was abandoned, and the governor had them transferred to the gaol. They found the gaol no pleasanter than it had been in the time of Perpetua ; but for them, as for her, it was transfigured. "We dreaded not the foul darkness of the place. The gloomy prison shone with spiritual brightness ; and faith and devotion, like the day, clothed us with white light to meet the horrors of the dark and the things which the impenetrable night concealed." Going up to the "highest place of punishment" was like going up to heaven. "What days and what nights we spent there," they go on to say in a more natural tone, "cannot be expressed : the miseries of the prison are beyond putting into words." But for a few days the visits of their brethren brought them refreshment, and "all the discomfort of the night was removed by the consolation and gladness of the day."

A series of visions came to them, as they came to the companions of Perpetua, and as they came to Cyprian. The first was given to a man named Renus. "He saw a number of persons brought into court one by one. As each one advanced, a lantern was borne in front of him : no one came forth who was not preceded by his lantern. And when we had come forth with our lanterns he awoke. And when he related his vision to us we were glad, trusting to walk with Christ, who is a lantern unto our feet, being the Word of God."

After that night they say that they were spending "a merry day," when they were suddenly carried off to the procurator. "Our talk," they say, "was of the consolations of the future ; and that enjoyment of such happiness might not be too long delayed, the soldiers,



who did not know where the governor wished to hear us, led us about hither and thither all over the forum." The clank of their chains was like music to the ears of men who were longing for martyrdom. Then they were called into the *secretarium*, or private audience-chamber. The hour for their public trial, and for their martyrdom, was not yet come; but they felt from what took place that day that they had already gained one victory over the devil, and were being reserved to gain another.

They were soon put to another test. Hunger and thirst were tried upon them for many days in an aggravated form. Even the poor rations of coarse bread and cold water which the state provided were withheld, or partly withheld from them, and a large number of them naturally were taken ill. When they were in this miserable condition, they were cheered by another vision, vouchsafed to a priest named Victor, who died immediately after receiving it. He said that he saw a boy come into the prison with a countenance of inexpressible brightness, who led them in all directions and tried every means of egress from the prison, but they could nowhere make their way out. "Then he said to me, 'You must still suffer a little, because for the present you are hindered; but be of good cheer, for I am with you;' and he added, 'Tell them that you shall have a more glorious crown;' and again, 'The spirit hastens to its God.'" This last saying meant, no doubt, that on leaving the body the spirits of the martyrs passed at once into the presence of God, without the delay which was believed to beset the spirits of ordinary Christians. The words aroused in the mind of the priest a desire for fuller information. "His soul, so close to its passion, asked after its

appointed place, and questioned that lord, where Paradise was. He answered, 'It is beyond the world.' 'Show it me,' he cried. And the other replied, 'And what room shall there be for faith?' Then in his human weakness Victor said, 'I cannot keep what thou commandest; give me a sign that I may give them.' The lord answered and said, 'Give them the sign of Jacob.'" The sign of Jacob was, perhaps, that ladder set up from earth to heaven, up which Perpetua had seen herself and Saturus climbing into the presence of her Saviour. The sufferers rejoiced that they were allowed to bear labours like those of the patriarchs, though they could not hope to attain an equal degree of righteousness.

"But He who said, 'Call upon Me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me,' for His own glory turned and remembered us, after prayer had been made to Him, and foretold to us the gift which His mercy gave.

"A vision was shown to our sister Quartillosia, who was here with us. This woman's husband and son had suffered three days before. She herself speedily followed her kindred, while still here in the prison. She thus related what she saw. 'I saw,' she said, 'my son who has suffered come hither to the prison; and he sat on the brim of a fountain of water, and said: God hath seen your affliction and your distress. And behind him entered a young man wonderfully tall, carrying two bowls full of milk, one in each hand, and said: Be of good courage; God hath remembered you. And from the bowls which he carried he gave us all to drink, and the bowls failed not. And suddenly the stone which divided the window in the middle was taken away; and when the middle piece was taken away, the open

windows let in the free face of the sky. And the young man put down the bowls which he carried, one on the right side and the other on the left, and said : Behold, ye have been satisfied, and there is abundance, and a third bowl shall come to you besides ; and he departed.' ”

The next day a plentiful supply was brought to them by Herennianus, the subdeacon whom Cyprian had employed on a similar errand when he was in exile at Curubis, and by a catechumen of the name of January. They had been sent by one of the leading presbyters of Carthage, whose name was Lucian. The prisoners, who had then for two days been entirely without food, began to revive, and the sick to recover their health.

The treatment of Christians who had more or less criminally fallen away under persecution caused much anxiety and dissension in the church ; and these brave confessors in the prison at Carthage were not left untroubled by the questions raised. A woman who had been deprived of the privileges of a communicant had surreptitiously come back to communion. It appears that one of the confessors, named Julian, had abetted her in the breach of discipline, and another of them, named Montanus, had spoken severely to him on the subject. Some coolness had arisen in consequence between the two men, and did not immediately pass away. That night Montanus had a vision which caused him searchings of heart.

“ I thought,” he said, “ that the centurions came for us. They led us a long journey, and in the course of it we came to an immense plain, where we were met by Cyprian and by Leucius.” Leucius was probably a confessor to whom, among others, a letter of Cyprian’s is addressed, and who must have met his martyrdom

soon after. "We reached a place which shone white, and our garments became white, and our flesh was changed and became whiter than our white garments. So transparent was our flesh that the eye could penetrate into the depth of our hearts. I happened to glance at my own breast, and saw there something not clean ; and in my vision I woke up. Lucian met me"—the presbyter who had sent help to the prisoners who were still alive—"and I told him my vision, and I said to him, 'That spot means that I did not make it up at once with Julian.' And at that I awoke."

The vision gave the prisoners occasion to send to their brethren at liberty an urgent and touching entreaty to cultivate a spirit of concord and charity, and to "imitate here what we hope to be hereafter."

At this point the writing left by the martyrs themselves comes to an end, but the story is completed by contemporaries who survived.

After they had borne the horrors of their confinement for many months, they were at length brought into court and examined by the new proconsul. All confessed that they were Christians, and Lucius, Montanus, Julian, and Victoricus confessed that they were members of the clergy, and as such were ordered to instant execution. A young man named Flavian confessed likewise that he was a deacon ; but a body of his heathen friends and former schoolfellows, who were determined to save him, asserted that his confession was false, and he was remanded for further inquiry. Flavian, like Felicity, the comrade of Perpetua, was deeply disappointed at being parted from so goodly a company ; "yet his habitual faith and devotion assured him that it was the will of God, and the sorrow of his bereavement and solitude was assuaged by religious

wisdom. 'The heart of the king,' he said, 'is in the hand of God ; why then should I be melancholy, or be angry with a man who only does as he is bidden ?''

Meanwhile the others were led to the place of slaughter. A great crowd of heathens accompanied them, and of the brethren "who had learned from Cyprian to pay respect to all God's witnesses for faith and religion," but who came on that day in greater numbers than usual. The joyful countenances of the martyrs would have been enough to encourage others to follow their example, even if they had said nothing ; but there was no lack of profitable words. Lucius, who was always gentle and modest, had been sadly broken in health by his imprisonment, and was unable to bear the stifling throng. He was allowed to walk in advance of the rest, with only a few companions. One saying of his was remembered for the lowliness which it revealed. The brethren intreated him to remember them when he was gone, but Lucius would not presume upon the privileges of a martyr even on the day of his martyrdom. "Do you remember me," was his reply. Julian and Victoricus discoursed of brotherly concord, and commended all the clergy to the loyalty of the brethren, especially those who had provided supplies to the starving Christians in the prison.

It was Montanus, however, who took the leading part on that day. Stalwart in body and vigorous in mind, and never disposed to conceal his belief for fear of any man, he seemed, as the hour of his martyrdom approached, to receive something of that dying inspiration which Cyprian had hoped to receive. "He that sacrificeth unto any god," he cried repeatedly, quoting from the Book of Exodus, "save unto the Lord only, he shall be utterly destroyed." He spoke against the



pride and the factiousness of heretics, and bade them see a mark of the true Church in the number of her martyrs, and urged them to return to her bosom. Like a true disciple of Cyprian, he reproved the impatience of the Christians who had fallen, and who were eager to be restored before their penitence had been fully tested. He dwelt on the importance of unity among the bishops of the Church, and of obedience on the part of the laity towards their bishops. The executioner was preparing to deliver his stroke, when Montanus spread his hands towards heaven and prayed with a loud voice, which was heard not only by the Christians near him, but by the heathen bystanders as well, that Flavian, whose popularity had hindered him from being among them that day, might follow the third day after. Then, as a pledge that his prayer would be fulfilled, he took the handkerchief with which he was about to bind his eyes, and tearing it in half, he gave the other half to the Christians who stood by, for Flavian to bind his eyes with it two days later ; and he charged the brethren to keep a piece of ground for Flavian in the midst of the graves which he and those who were slain with him were to occupy, that Flavian might not be parted from them in death.

Two days after, according to the prayer of Montanus, Flavian was once more called up. His spirits were not impaired by the unwelcome delay which had been imposed upon him. His heroic mother was inseparable from him. He was her only son. She had been more grieved than Flavian himself at his being sent back to prison and not to death. Flavian was obliged to console her disappointment, though he praised her courage. "Dearest mother,"

he said, "I have always thought that I should like, if it were granted me to confess Christ, to enjoy my martyrdom, and to appear often in chains, and to be put off again and again. So if I have got what I wished for, we ought to be proud rather than sorry." It was observed that the prison doors, as he returned to them, were harder to open than usual, and that the servants of the turnkeys refused to do their work. It seemed to the Christians as if some evil spirit in the place were protesting against the introduction of "the man of heaven and of God" into the filth within.

The "third day" was like a day of resurrection to Flavian. He felt certain that he was leaving the prison to return to it no more. When the brethren met him with good wishes, he assured them that he would "make the peace with them all" that day at the place of execution. Arriving at the governor's quarters, he was left a long time waiting for his summons, amidst a great gazing crowd. The Christians stood at his side, in a compact body, holding one another's hands in token of loving comradeship. But his heathen school-fellows were there also, and entreated him with tears to put away his obstinacy. They told him that if he would but sacrifice for the moment, he could do as he liked afterwards. They told him that it was absurd, with a real death staring him in the face, to think of the dim chances of what he called a second death. Flavian thanked them for their affection, and for giving him the best advice that they could give, but told them plainly that he thought it better to maintain the liberty of his conscience by submitting to the slaughter than to worship a stone. He told them that there was a supreme God, the Creator, who alone was to be worshipped; that a martyr's death is not the defeat

but the victory of life ; and that if they wished to know the truth, they ought to become Christians themselves.

With cruel kindness his friends wished to resort to tortures in order to spare his life. His turn came to be called to the bar. The proconsul asked him why he had told a falsehood, and pretended to be a deacon, when he was not? Flavian replied that it was no falsehood, but the truth. One of the centurions brought documentary evidence that Flavian was no such thing ; but the martyr answered, "Is it likely that I should tell such a falsehood, and the forger of this document tell the truth?" "You lie, you lie," shouted the bystanders. The proconsul once more asked him if he spoke the truth. "What have I to gain by lying?" Flavian replied. At this there were loud cries for the application of torture. "But the Lord, who had fully proved the faith of His servant in the horrors of the prison, would not suffer even a scratch to be inflicted on the body of the martyr." He "turned the heart of the king" to pronounce sentence forthwith, and the faithful witness was delivered to the sword without delay.

As soon as he knew that he was to die, he joined in happy conversation with the brethren, and charged them to write an account of these events. He begged them also to relate the visions which had been given to him, especially during his last two days in prison.

"Before any one else had suffered except our bishop," he said—the bishop being Cyprian—"it was shown me on this wise. I thought that I asked Cyprian whether the death-stroke was painful. He answered me and said, 'When your soul is in heaven, it is no longer your own flesh that suffers. The body does not feel when the mind is wholly devoted to God.'"

Another vision came to him after several of his

comrades had died. "I was sad at night, because my companions were gone, and I was left behind ; and a man appeared to me, saying, 'Why are you sad ?' I told him the reason of my sadness, and he answered, 'Does that make you sad ? You are already twice a confessor ; to-morrow you shall be a martyr to the sword.' "

Another vision was this. "When Successus," the Bishop of Abbir, to whom Cyprian's letter about the edict of Valerian was addressed, "and Paul, with their companions, had been crowned, and I was recovering, after my sickness, I saw Bishop Successus come to my house, with his face and his raiment exceedingly bright, so that it was difficult to recognise him, because my fleshly eyes were dazzled by his angelic splendour. When at length I recognised him, he said to me, 'I am sent to tell you that you are to suffer.' And with that saying two soldiers came to conduct me. They conducted me to a spot where a multitude of the brotherhood was assembled. As soon as I was brought where the governor was, I was ordered into the dock. And suddenly my mother appeared in the midst of the people, crying, 'Give praise, give praise ; for no one has ever delivered such a testimony.' " The friends relate that in one particular he had certainly distinguished himself beyond others. When their miserable rations had fallen short in the prison, Flavian had frequently refused to take his share, in order that there might be a little more for the rest to eat.

As they drew near to the Fuscianum, where he was to be put to death, a gentle, steady rain began to fall, which had the effect of scattering idle sightseers, and leaving the Christians to converse freely together, and to exchange the tokens of the Church's peace without

being disturbed by intruding eyes. To Flavian, full of the thought of his Saviour's Passion, the rain that descended upon his martyrdom recalled a momentous occurrence on Calvary, and he said that once more there would be water and blood together.

Reaching a little eminence which was suitable for addressing the large company of Christians, Flavian asked for silence, and in a brief discourse gave them all the "peace" of communion with the martyrs, on condition of their preserving the unity of the Church. His last words were to commend the presbyter Lucian for election to the still vacant throne of Cyprian. Then he moved down to the spot where he was to be killed, and binding his eyes with the other half of Montanus's handkerchief, he knelt down for prayer, and as his prayer ended he received the stroke of the sword.<sup>1</sup>

Great as were the sufferings of the Christians in proconsular Africa, the persecution in the neighbouring province of Numidia was yet worse. An unknown writer, who appears to have belonged to Carthage, gives an account of what befell himself and two of his Christian friends in the course of a journey which they took at this time in Numidia.

The writer, with his friends Marian and James, reached Muguas, which was a suburb of Cirta, now Constantine, and made some stay there. While they were at Muguas they were honoured by a visit from two illustrious Numidian bishops, named Agapius and Secundinus, who had been banished under the first edict of Valerian, and now, like Cyprian, were recalled to be put to death under the second. Both were men of charitable, peace-loving disposition. Secundinus had from youth dedicated himself, like St. Paul, to a life

<sup>1</sup> Franchi de' Cavalieri, *Gli Atti dei SS. Montano, &c.*



of single chastity. They took up their lodging for a few days with the three travellers. "Being full of the spirit of life and grace," they lost no opportunity of inspiring other Christians with the martyr's faith. They preached the word of God, by which they themselves lived, to the brethren at Muguas in a way that kindled every hearer with enthusiasm.

Among those who were most profoundly moved by their example and their discourses were Marian and James. They had already been to some extent prepared by a vision which came to James in the course of their journey. While the three men were driving along the uneven road in their springless carriage, James fell into a deep sleep in the middle of the day, under the glaring sun. His friends called to him, and at last succeeded in waking him. James told them the dream which he had dreamed. "I have had a fright," he said, "though not unmixed with joy; and you, brothers, must rejoice with me. I saw a young man of immense height clothed in a flowing tunic of such white light that it was impossible to look steadily at him. His feet did not touch the ground, and his face was above the clouds. As he ran past, he threw two purple girdles into our laps—one into yours, Marian, and one into mine—and said, 'Follow me quickly.'"

Marian and James had not long to wait after the departure of the bishops before the palm was put into their hands. Two days after, a band of centurions came to apprehend them, accompanied by a number of heathen fanatics from Cirta. The legate of the province was so zealous in executing the edict of Valerian that the ordinary agencies of the police were not sufficient for his purposes, and the military were called into requisition. The villa where Agapius and

Secundinus had lodged was proved in the eyes of the authorities to be a nest and rendezvous of Christians. To their great and unbounded delight, the three friends were carried off into the city, the unknown writer as a prisoner, the others drawn by their affectionate anxiety on his behalf. The enthusiasm with which Marian and James encouraged the other under his examination showed that they were Christians. They were arrested and examined, and confessing bravely, were cast into prison.

Dreadful tortures were inflicted upon them by the officer on duty, with the approbation of his superior and of the magistrates of Cirta, "those priests of the devil," as the writer calls them, "who thought that the faith of Christians, who care so little for the body, could be broken by the rending of their limbs." James, whose faith was of an austere type, and who had already been a confessor in the persecution of Decius, led or allowed his captors to believe that he was not only a Christian, but a deacon. Marian, on the other hand, who held the office of a "reader," was tortured because he would not acknowledge that he belonged to a higher order in the Church. The brutal tormentors hung him up by the thumbs, and tied weights to his feet to make him heavier—unequal weights, to increase the strain upon one side. While he was in that position his body was torn with the iron claw. But he could not be induced to say either more or less than the truth, and was taken back to prison, rejoicing. There James and he, with other brethren, "celebrated the glad victory of the Lord with many prayers."

That night, after all that his poor body had gone through, Marian had a vision. "There was shown to me an exceedingly lofty white tribunal, upon which sat,

like the governor of a province, a judge with a very handsome countenance. Before it was a prisoner's dock, or scaffold, which instead of the usual lowly platform, reached by a single step, was furnished with a whole flight of steps and was raised to a very great height. Confessors were being set before the judge, one class after another, and the judge kept ordering them off to the sword. My turn came. Then I heard a loud and powerful voice say, 'Fasten Marian up.' I began to mount the scaffold, when behold, all of a sudden, Cyprian appeared to me, sitting on the right hand of the judge, and reached out his hand, and lifted me to a higher part of the scaffold, and smiled, and said, 'Come and sit beside me.' Then followed the hearing of fresh classes, while I sat by as an assessor. And the judge rose up, and we escorted him to his *praetorium*. Our way led through pleasant meadows, and scenery delightfully clothed with green and leafy woods, where towering cypresses and pines which knocked against the sky threw their thick shadows. It seemed as if the whole district round was crowned with these green woods. There was a dell in the middle, where a clear and copious spring of pure water rose and flowed without stint. And behold, the judge vanished from our sight. Then Cyprian caught up a bowl which lay beside the spring, and, like a thirsty man, filled it at the spring, and drained it, and filling it again reached it out to me, and I drank it, nothing loth. And as I was saying, 'Thanks be to God,' I woke at the sound of my own voice."

Marian had a fellow-prisoner, whose name was Æmilian. He belonged by birth to the order of knights, of which special mention was made in the edict of Valerian. He was nearly fifty years of age,

and had lived a life of virgin purity from the beginning. In prison he continued the discipline of fasting and prayer which he had practised before. One day when they were expecting to receive the Blessed Sacrament on the morrow, and Æmilian had redoubled his fasting and his prayers in preparation for it, he lay down for a few minutes of sleep at noon and dreamed a vivid dream.

"They were fetching me out of prison," he said, "to trial, when my heathen brother met me. He was very curious about us, and asked in anything but complimentary tones how long we had been kept in the penal darkness and starvation of the prison. I answered that Christ's soldiers find in the word of God clear light in the darkness and satisfying food in hunger. When he heard that, he said, 'I assure you that all you who are in the prison, if you persist in your obstinacy, will be put to death.'" The edict of Valerian had left it a somewhat open question in each case whether a man of Æmilian's rank should be put to death. "I was afraid," Æmilian continued, "that he was mocking me with a falsehood of his own devising; and desiring to make sure of my heart's wish, I said, 'Is it really true that we shall all suffer?' He repeated his assertion, and said, 'You will very soon come to the sword and to blood. But I should like to know,' he pursued, 'whether all of you who despise this life receive an equal recompense in heaven, without any distinction.' I replied, 'I am not able to offer an opinion on so great a subject; but lift up your eyes for a moment to the sky, and you will see an innumerable multitude of stars shining. Do all the stars shine with an equal glory of light? Yet it is the same light that shines in them all.' His increasing curiosity

found another question to ask. 'If there is a distinction among you,' he said, 'which of the number are the most deserving of the Lord's good will?' 'There are two in particular,' I replied, 'whose names are known to God, but must not be told to you.' At the end, to his yet more determined and embarrassing questions, I answered, 'They are those whose crowns are the more glorious because the more hardly and tardily won; and for this reason it is written, It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven.'"

After these visions, the Christians still remained a few days in prison before they were brought to the magistrates of Cirta, in order that the preliminary examination might be made, and the articles of the bill against them might be made out, to be forwarded to the legate. While this was done, the eyes of all the heathen in court were drawn to one of the bystanders, who was so inflamed by the approach of martyrdom that "Christ shone in his face and bearing." In great indignation the magistrates asked him if he belonged to the same name and religion; and the man "in an instant clutched the sweet companionship and confessed."

The legate was at the great military colony of Lambæsis, which was about eighty miles from Cirta. Thither the growing band of martyrs was despatched, together with the articles of their examination at Cirta. They were thrown into prison again at Lambæsis, "the only form of hospitality," says the writer, "which the heathen bestow upon the righteous." Meanwhile for many days there had been a great deal of Christian bloodshed at Lambæsis. The "ingenious cruelty" of the legate had hit upon an expedient for



bringing the Christians round. He separated the lay Christians from those who were in orders, and dealt with them first, in the hope that when deprived of the exhortations of their clergy they would abjure their faith. The number of lay believers to be tried was so large that James and Marian and the others who belonged to the clergy had to bear the weariness of a long delay, and were a little depressed in consequence.

Among those who had been put to death before the arrival of James and Marian was the bishop Agapius. He had been accompanied by two girls, named Tertulla and Antonia, whom he loved as his own daughters. His earnest prayer for them had been that they might attain martyrdom along with himself. This prayer he had repeated many and many a time, until at last he was stopped by a voice which came to him, saying, "Why dost thou ask so often for that which was granted at thy first request?"

When James was suffering from depression in the prison at Lambæsis, the martyred Agapius appeared to him in his sleep. It was on the last day of his life that James related the occurrence to his friend, while waiting for the executioner to perform his duty. "Yes, indeed," he said; "I am going to sup with Agapius and the other blessed martyrs. Last night, my brethren, I saw our friend Agapius, surrounded by all the others who were imprisoned with us at Cirta, looking more glad than the rest, and holding a solemn and joyful banquet. Marian and I were carried away by the spirit of love to join it, as if to one of our love-feasts, when a boy ran to meet us, who proved to be one of a pair of twins who suffered three days ago in company with their mother. He had a wreath of roses round his neck, and carried a beautiful green palm advanced in his

right hand, and he said, 'Why are you so impatient? Rejoice and be glad, for to-morrow you also shall sup with us.'"

The next morning the governor, "obeying the promise of God," although he knew it not, gave the sentence which set the clerical members of the party free from the tribulations of the world. They were brought out to a place where a stream ran through some flat ground between hilly banks, which formed a theatre for the spectators. The number of persons to be beheaded was large, and the executioner thought it advisable, in order to avoid the heaping up of corpses in one place, or the waste of time in removing one to make room for another, to arrange his prisoners in rows, and to take them one after another at a run. When their eyes were bound, as the custom was, a gift of spiritual sight came to some of them. They told the brethren near them that they spied a troop of young men in white raiment, riding on snow-white horses. Others confirmed their statement, saying that they could hear the neighing and the tramp of the horses. A prophetic inspiration fell upon Marian, and he cried that the avenging of the saints was at hand, and that plagues like those of the Apocalypse were proceeding out of the height of heaven to the earth, pestilence, captivity, and famine, earthquakes, and the bites of poisonous flies. The mother of Marian, a brave woman of the name of Mary, had reached the place of execution in time to see her son die. She covered the poor severed neck with kisses, congratulating herself that she had been permitted to be the mother of such a son.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Franchi de' Cavalieri in *Studi e Testi* (1900); Von Gebhardt, p. 134.

## CHAPTER X

### LAWRENCE AND FRUCTUOSUS

IT is a misfortune that the Acts of the martyrs of Rome have not been preserved in the same purity as those of the African saints. Stephen, the headstrong Bishop of Rome who entered so fiercely into controversy with Cyprian, was succeeded in August 257 by "a good peaceable priest"—so Cyprian's biographer, Pontius, describes him—whose name was Xystus—or Sixtus, as he was called in later times. Xystus was a Greek, a native of Athens, and a devoted teacher. His short episcopate was marked by the care which he bestowed upon the relics of the martyrs. In particular he removed the bodies of St. Peter and St. Paul from their original resting-places on the Vatican hill and on the road to Ostia, and buried them in the safer cemetery on the Appian Way which has given its name of *Catacumbas* to all similar cemeteries underground.

It is possible that these activities of Xystus may have had some share in provoking the terrible second edict of Valerian, who in his first edict had forbidden the Christians to enter their cemeteries. On the 6th of August 258, Xystus was sitting in his chair and teaching in the cemetery called the Cemetery of Praetextatus, which, as being private property, may have seemed less dangerous than some of the others, when a body of soldiers burst in to arrest him and carry him to the prefect. His condemnation was immediate ; the terms

of the edict were that "bishops, priests, and deacons were to be executed at once." But instead of taking him to some customary place of execution, he was carried back to the spot where he was found holding his forbidden assembly. The faithful endeavoured to defend their beloved teacher at the cost of their own lives ; but Xystus put them aside, and gave himself up to the sword, and was slain in the cemetery. Four of his seven deacons perished with him.<sup>1</sup> When the cemetery was opened in the year 1848, there was still to be seen a rude drawing of him seated in his chair, with a disciple at his feet. Near it was scratched an invocation of January, Agathopus, and Felicissimus, who were three of the four deacons beheaded with him.

A fifth of his faithful deacons was destined to attain a greater celebrity even than Xystus himself. His name was Lawrence. When he saw that Xystus was to die, and to die without him, Lawrence could not control his grief. According to the tradition of the Church, he cried, " You never used to offer the sacrifice without your attendant deacon ; will you now leave him behind ? " Xystus replied, " I do not leave you behind for long. A more glorious conflict awaits you. In three days' time you will follow me."

As deacon, and, according to some accounts the head deacon, of the great church of Rome, Lawrence was entrusted with the charge of the money by which its fifteen hundred widows and pensioners were maintained, and of other treasures belonging to the community. The prefect of the city sent for him, and demanded the surrender of the property. The story

<sup>1</sup> Cyprian, *Epist.* lxxx. The inscriptions of Damasus relating to Xystus may be seen in Benson's *Cyprian*, p. 489 foll.

goes that Lawrence promised to comply, but asked for three days in which to collect the articles and to make an inventory of them. During the respite, he sold the precious vessels that were under his care, and gave everything away to the poor. When the day came, Lawrence invited the prefect to follow him to one of the churches of the city, and there showed him in long rows the aged, the maimed, the blind. According to another version of the story, he induced the prefect to send a number of waggons to fetch his treasures, and then presented himself at the head of the strange muster. "These," he said, "are the treasures of the Church." Enraged at the lesson which Lawrence wished to teach him, the prefect, instead of sending him at once to the sword, which was the usual death in this persecution, ordered him to the fire. Perhaps he intended it for a torture rather than for a capital punishment, hoping that Lawrence might be induced by it to renounce his Christianity; for he expressly ordered that it should be a slow fire. The martyr was accordingly stretched upon an iron grate, or gridiron, and laid over the coals. Neither his faith nor his wit failed under the trial. After he had lain for a good while slowly roasting, he said to his torturers, "You can turn me now; I am done enough on that side."<sup>1</sup>

These were not the only martyrs of the church at Rome under Valerian. A priest, a subdeacon, a reader, and a doorkeeper were put to death at the same time as Lawrence,—doubtless for their share in the gathering in the cemetery of Praetextatus. Many other "companions of Xystus" are referred to in the inscription which Damasus, a hundred or a hundred and twenty years later, put up in the chapel where Xystus was

<sup>1</sup> Ambrose, *De Offic. Ministr.* i. 41, ii. 28; Prudentius, *περὶ Στεφ.* ii.



buried. It was probably at this time that a martyrdom took place in which no prefect or judge had part. The Christians were accustomed, when circumstances permitted, to send the Blessed Sacrament from the altar of the church to the confessors in prison, as well as to others who were hindered from communicating in the assembly of the faithful. The honour of bearing it was often given to those who were called acolytes. An acolyte named Tarsicius was passing on this sacred errand from one of the catacombs along the Appian Way to Christians in the city. The Eucharist, probably in a small box, or perhaps wrapped in a linen cloth, was concealed beneath his cloak. Something in his mien and bearing made him an object of suspicion to a band of soldiers whom he met. They stopped him, and inquired what he was carrying. Tarsicius refused to let them see. They struck him and beat him, but he was proof against their violence. At last they left him dead, with his secret still undisclosed. "He chose," said the epitaph which Damasus cut over his grave, "rather to lay down his life under the blows than to betray that heavenly Body to mad dogs."<sup>1</sup>

If in the time of Decius the church of Spain presented only examples of apostasy, it can boast of at least one group of martyrs under Valerian. On Sunday, January 16, in the year 259, Fructuosus, the Bishop of Tarragona, had retired to rest, when a band of six men from the governor's office were sent to seize him. At the sound of their feet, the bishop arose at once, and went to the door to meet them. "Come," said the soldiers; "the governor has sent for you and your deacons." "By all means let us go," said the bishop; "or will you wait while I put on my shoes?" They

<sup>1</sup> Damasus in Migne's *Patr. Lat.* xiii. 392.

said that he could please himself. When he was ready, they took him at once to prison. The prison, however, was not very jealously guarded. The brethren passed in and out, bringing comforts for their bishop, and begging him to remember them when he should have passed to his glory. He was even able to administer baptism in the prison to one of his disciples.

On the 21st, which was a Friday, Fructuosus and his two deacons were brought before the governor, whose name was Æmilian. "Have you heard what the emperors have ordered?" the governor asked. "I do not know," said Fructuosus, "what their orders may be, but I am a Christian." "They have ordered the worship of the gods," said Æmilian. "I," said the bishop, "worship one God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all things that are therein." The governor said, "I suppose you are aware that there are gods." "Indeed I am not," answered Fructuosus. "You shall soon know it," said Æmilian. The bishop's only reply was to cast himself in silence upon God. "Who," asked the governor, "will be listened to, or feared, or worshipped, if the gods are not religiously honoured, nor the countenances of the emperors adored?"

He turned to the deacons. "Do not listen to the words of Fructuosus," he said to one of them, whose name was Augurius. "I worship the Almighty God," the man replied. Æmilian addressed the other deacon, Eulogius. "Do you worship Fructuosus too?" he asked. "No," he answered, "I do not worship Fructuosus, but I worship the same God as Fructuosus does." Æmilian came back to the chief prisoner. "Are you a bishop?" he asked. The word was expressly mentioned in the edict of Valerian, with a

terrible penalty attached to it. "Yes," said Fructuosus ; "I am." "You mean that you *were*," said the governor, and condemned them to be burned alive.

As they passed to the amphitheatre, where they were to die, the heathen populace, to whom Fructuosus had greatly endeared himself—perhaps during the great plague which had lately ravaged the empire—were even more moved with grief than the Christians. The Christians were proud of their bishop's approaching glory. Some of them pressed forward and offered to the sufferers a cup of drugged wine, to relieve their dying pains ; but the martyrs put it from them. Wednesday, in the early Church, as well as Friday, was commonly observed as a strict fast until after midday. This discipline the good bishop and his deacons had observed, even in their prison. It was still only ten o'clock in the morning. It was not yet time, they said, to break their fast. As they entered the amphitheatre, one of the church readers drew near, with streaming eyes, to draw off the bishop's shoes ; but the bishop answered, "Let be, my son. I will do that myself. I am quite strong and happy, and assured of the Lord's promise." Another Christian seized his hand and begged that he would remember him. In a loud voice Fructuosus answered, "I must bear in mind the whole Catholic Church, dispersed from the east even to the west."

They mounted the pile on which they were to burn. In spite of the officers in charge, Fructuosus cried aloud to his fellow Christians in the amphitheatre, "You will not be left without a shepherd. The kindness of the Lord can never fail, nor His promise, either here or hereafter. This which you see is but the weakness of an hour." The flames consumed the fastenings which held them to the stake ; and the martyrs, availing them-

selves of their liberty, threw themselves upon their knees in the midst of the fire, and stretched out their arms cross-wise, as was the custom of the early Christians at prayer, and so remained until they died. Some of the brethren who were servants of Æmilian, believed that they could see the three martyrs ascending crowned into heaven, and pointed them out to the governor's daughter.<sup>1</sup>

The records of martyrdoms under Valerian in the eastern part of the empire are less complete and less trustworthy than of those in the west.

Eusebius relates that there were three young Christians who lived near Caesarea in Palestine, of which Eusebius was himself bishop some fifty or sixty years later. Their names were Priscus, Malchus, and Alexander. They were safe and unmolested in their quiet country homes, but hearing of martyrdoms elsewhere, they began to reproach themselves for sitting tamely at their ease and keeping their religion hidden. Having formed their resolution, they started for Caesarea, and—in spite of the discouragement which the Church had always offered to such a proceeding—presented themselves together before the magistrate, declared themselves Christians, and were condemned to the wild beasts. About the same time, in the same city, the same dreadful death was awarded to a poor woman who belonged, like Metrodorus at Smyrna in the persecution of Decius, to the heretical sect of the Marcionites. Eusebius does not record her name; perhaps by his time it had been forgotten upon earth.<sup>2</sup>

At another Caesarea, in Cappadocia, a young martyr, named Cyril, won great renown. It is not clear from the account which we possess whether his

<sup>1</sup> Ruinart, p. 191.

<sup>2</sup> Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* vii. 12.

father was a heathen, or a cautious and timid Christian. The boy, however, had the name of our Lord continually upon his lips, professing in the most unguarded manner that he was obeying the instigation of Christ. Threats and floggings seemed only to whet his appetite for a greater endurance ; and at last his father, with the approval of the neighbours, turned him out of the house without any means of support. Cyril seemed to be wholly unconcerned at this unnatural treatment, and was only delighted when the police brought him before the tribunal of the magistrate. "I forgive you, boy," said the magistrate, "and so does your father. He will take you home again. You can have all the comforts of your father's house if you will be a good boy and think what you are about." The boy answered : "I do not mind being punished for what I have done. I am very happy with God, in spite of being turned out. I shall have a better home by-and-by. I am glad to become poor, that I may be rich. I am not afraid of a good death. I see a better life before me." The magistrate did not wish to put a boy to death, but thought that a feint of execution would bring him to his senses. He ordered his hands to be tied, and that he should be led to the fire. The officials reported that the boy had shed no tear, nor showed any sign of alarm. The magistrate recalled him and said, "You have seen the fire, boy, and the sword. Be good, and you shall enjoy yourself at home again with your father." Cyril only answered indignantly, that it was a great shame to fetch him back when the fire and the sword were ready, and begged that they would make short work with him, and send him to the better home and the true riches. Some of the bystanders were moved to tears, but he told them that they would have



rejoiced if they had known where he was going. He asked for no better way of spending his life. And so he went to die.<sup>1</sup>

There was an aged ascetic, probably at this time, who lived at Patara, on the southern coast of Asia Minor. His name was Leo. An acquaintance of his, called Paregorius, had suffered death, perhaps in the persecution of Decius, and Leo felt deeply grieved that his own life had been spared. One day the proconsul, Lollianus, came to Patara. A festival of the god Serapis was being held, and the officials took the occasion to enforce the edict which compelled all the inhabitants to join in the sacrificial acts. Leo saw the people streaming to the festival, and withdrew indignantly to the place where the relics of Paregorius had been buried, and there prayed, as he was wont to do. He returned to his house with a mind preoccupied by the thought of his martyred friend. A dream that night showed him a great torrent in which he and Paregorius stood, and in spite of the violence of the flood he found it not difficult to reach the point which Paregorius had reached before him. Next morning he started once more for the grave of his friend. He chose the public road, which led past the temple of Fortune. The temple was all lighted with lanterns and tapers. Leo flung aside his self-control. He dashed in pieces the lanterns, and trampled the tapers underfoot, crying aloud, "If you think that the gods have any power, let them defend themselves." A hue and cry was raised after him, and on his return home he found himself arrested by order of the governor. Confronted with the charge brought against him, Leo replied that lights and tapers were vain and senseless things, and

<sup>1</sup> Ruinart, p. 213.

that what the true God cared for was the contrite heart and the humble soul, and exhorted the magistrate to honour that God and His only-begotten Son, the Saviour of the world and the Creator of our souls. The magistrate replied that all this was irrelevant to the charge: Leo had been accused of an act of violence and was giving a lecture on Christianity. He offered him liberty and friendship on condition of obedience to the edict, but Leo refused to worship gods who were no gods. The lash was applied, but Leo's heart was uplifted to the Lord, and he seemed to feel nothing. The patient magistrate was willing to forgo an act of sacrifice if Leo would only repeat after him the formula, "Great are the gods." "Great they are," answered the martyr, "to destroy the souls that believe in them." At last the patience of the official gave way. Yielding to the clamour of the multitude, he ordered the old man to be dragged away by the feet and thrown into the torrent which rushed through the town. Leo burst into thanksgivings to the God who allowed him so soon to be reunited to his friend Paregorius, and into prayers for the conversion of those who slew him. He was dead before they reached the rock from which they hurled him.<sup>1</sup>

The tale of Nicephorus, the martyr of Antioch, has been transmitted to us in a form intended to bring out its edifying value, but it is not on that account to be despised.

There was a priest at Antioch, called Sapricius, who had fallen out with Nicephorus, a layman, formerly an intimate friend of his, and refused to be reconciled with him. On the outbreak of the persecution of Valerian, Sapricius was arrested, and made his confession boldly

<sup>1</sup> Ruinart, p. 478.

before the governor. He bore his tortures like a Christian, and was led away under sentence of death. As he passed to execution Nicephorus ran to meet him, fell at his feet, and begged his pardon ; but the priest made him no answer. At the gate leading out of the city, Nicephorus met him again, and cried, "Martyr of Christ, forgive me the wrong I did you as a man, and give me absolution. The crown is already given you by the Lord whom you have not denied, but have confessed before many witnesses." But the martyr was obstinately silent. Even the hangmen remarked upon the eagerness of Nicephorus. "We never saw such a fool," they said ; "the man is going to be beheaded : what can you want from a condemned man ?" "Ah," answered Nicephorus—and the answer completely breathes the spirit of the time—"you do not know what I ask from the confessor of Christ, but God knows." The intercessions of the martyrs were held to be all-powerful with God.

They came to the place of execution. Once more the importunate penitent approached Sapricius, reminding him of the Gospel words which say, "Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you ;" but the heart of the priest was as hard as ever. Then the executioners ordered Sapricius to kneel down and have his head cut off, in accordance with the edict of Valerian. The terror of death came over him. "Why?" he asked. They told him it was because he would not sacrifice to the gods, and because he disobeyed the imperial command, and all for the sake of a man called Christ. "Do not strike me," cried the poor wretch. "I will do what your emperors require. I will sacrifice to the gods."

The turn of Nicephorus was come. In the utmost distress he urged Sapricius to revoke his words, and not to cast away the crown which his confession and his torture had so nearly won. His exhortation, like his previous entreaties, fell upon deaf ears. Nicephorus offered himself to the executioners. "I am a Christian," he exclaimed; "I believe in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, whom this man has denied. Behead me instead of him." So the unforgiving man fell away, and the penitent became a martyr in his stead.<sup>1</sup>

The last martyrdom of this period with which we are acquainted took place at Caesarea, in Palestine, the scene of the martyrdom of Priscus and his friends. There was a military officer there, named Marinus, of good birth and large fortune, who was a Christian believer. The position of a centurion in his legion fell vacant, and Marinus was the next in succession for the office. He was about to receive his promotion when a rival stepped forward and said that, as a Christian, it was impossible for Marinus to comply with the requirements of the post, among which was an act of sacrifice to the emperors. The judge, a man of the name of Achaeus, questioned Marinus on the subject, and he acknowledged that he was a Christian. Achaeus gave him three hours in which to think things over, leaving him free to go wherever he pleased meanwhile. As soon as he left the court, Marinus was met by the good Theotecnus, bishop of the place, who took him by the hand and drew him into the church. He led him into the sanctuary itself, where none but the clergy were allowed to go. There, lifting the corner of the soldier's cloak, he pointed to the sword which hung at his side; then, taking from the altar the copy of the Gospels

<sup>1</sup> Ruinart, p. 209.

which lay upon it, he offered it to Marinus, and bade him choose between the book and the sword. Unhesitatingly Marinus grasped the book. "Hold fast then," said the bishop, "hold fast to God, and may you attain what you have chosen, by the strength which God gives. Go in peace." Marinus returned from the church to the court. The three hours were at an end, and the herald was preparing to summon him. With increased fervour he proclaimed his faith, and was sent away to die. A noble Roman senator, named Astyrius, or Asterius, a friend of the imperial family, who was present at the scene, took the corpse upon his shoulder, swathed it in precious stuffs, and buried it with great pomp.<sup>1</sup>

By the time that Marinus suffered, Valerian was no longer emperor. In a disastrous campaign against Sapor, King of Persia, he had been taken prisoner. For the few years that he survived, the unhappy emperor was treated with barbarous insolence by his captor, who made him bend his neck to make a mounting-block when he mounted his horse or his chariot; and when he died, his body was flayed, and the skin, dyed red, hung up in a Persian temple. His son, Gallienus, renounced the impossible task of crushing Christianity out, and for the first time in history made it a recognised religion of the Roman empire.

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* vii. 15, 16; Knopf's *Ausgewählte Märtyreracten*, p. 78.



## CHAPTER XI

### THE BEGINNINGS OF DIOCLETIAN

THE year of our Lord 284 is the era from which some Christian nations of the East still date. It was the year in which Diocletian became emperor ; and so terrible was the persecution which began in his reign, that all former persecutions seemed to the Christians as nothing in comparison of it. They called the date of Diocletian's accession "the Era of Martyrs."

It was not till Diocletian had reigned for many years that he turned his hand against the Church. At the beginning, like Valerian, he favoured Christianity. His own wife and daughter were reckoned Christians by a writer who lived in the imperial city and must have known. His most trusted chamberlains and court officials were all avowedly Christians. Christians were entrusted with the government of provinces and high offices of state, and were expressly dispensed, it is said, from attending religious ceremonies which were not agreeable to their consciences.

Nevertheless, even those days of peace and toleration were not wholly free from danger to Christians. Some localities, some positions in life, involved peril. This was especially the case with the army, and a few zealous Christians, especially in Africa, became martyrs for their faith, as others had done before them, by coming into collision with the rules of military discipline.

In the year 295, while Dion, the proconsul of Africa, was engaged in levying new troops, a young man named Maximilian was brought before him to be measured, as he sat in the forum at Theveste. The proconsul asked him his name, but he answered, "Why should you want to know my name? I cannot serve in the army; I am a Christian." There were many Christians in the army, and Dion would not listen to the excuse. "Measure him," he said. While they were doing it, Maximilian repeated, "I cannot serve; I cannot do what is wrong." "Take his height," said the proconsul. He was five feet ten. "Let him be marked," said the proconsul. Maximilian resisted. "I cannot do it," he said; "I cannot serve." "You had better serve," said Dion, "or it will be the worse for you." "I cannot," repeated the young man; "cut off my head if you like, but I cannot be a soldier of the world; I am a soldier of my God."

Maximilian's father was standing by. It was his business to collect the money paid by conscripts who wished to commute their service for a fine. The proconsul suspected that there was some collusion between the father and son. "Who has induced you to behave like this?" he asked the young man. "My own mind," replied Maximilian, "and He who called me." Dion turned to Victor, the father. "Give your son good advice," he said. "He knows his own business," replied Victor; "he has his own ideas of what is good for him." "Serve," repeated Dion to Maximilian, "and take the badge." "I will not take the badge," he answered; "I already have the sign of Christ my God." "I will soon despatch you to your Christ," said Dion. "I wish you would do it at once," the young man retorted; "that is my glory."

Dion said no more, but ordered the officials to hang the leaden badge round his neck. But Maximilian struggled against the distasteful emblem. "I will not take the badge of worldly warfare," he cried; "if you put it on me, I shall tear it off. It is of no use. I am a Christian; it is not lawful for me to wear this bit of lead round my neck after receiving the saving sign of my Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, whom you do not know, but who suffered for our salvation, whom God delivered up for our sins. All we Christians are His servants. We follow Him as the Prince of life and the Author of salvation." "Take the badge, I say, and serve," persisted Dion, "or you will come to a bad end." "I shall not come to an end," replied the enthusiastic young man; "my name is already with my Lord. I cannot serve." Dion condescended to argue once more. "Think of your youth," he said, "and serve; it is the proper thing for a young man." Maximilian answered, "My service is for my own Lord; I cannot engage in worldly warfare. I have already told you that I am a Christian." Dion the proconsul answered, "There are Christian soldiers in the sacred bodyguard of our lords Diocletian and Maximian, Constantius and Maximus: they serve." But no argument would convince Maximilian. "I suppose," he said, "that they know what is good for them; but I am a Christian, and cannot do what is wrong." "What wrong do men do who serve in the army?" the proconsul asked. "I need not tell you," said Maximilian; "you know well enough what they do." Once more the proconsul urged him to comply: "Come," he said, "serve; or else if you flout the service, you are on the way to perish." "I shall

not perish," answered Maximilian; "and if I pass out of the world, my soul lives with Christ my Lord."

The patience of the proconsul was exhausted, or his stock of arguments failed. "Strike out his name," he said to the officials. Then, turning to Maximilian, he said, "Because you have disloyally refused the service, you must receive sentence accordingly, as a caution to others." Then he read the sentence off his tablet: "Maximilian has disloyally refused the oath of service, and is therefore adjudged to be beheaded." The young man answered, "Thanks be to God." He was twenty-one years old—"twenty-one years in the world," says the ancient record, "three months and eighteen days."

As they led him to the place of execution, he said to the Christians near him, "Beloved brethren, hasten with all your might and with eager desire that you may be permitted to see the Lord, and that He may bestow upon you a crown like mine." They marked the bright smile with which he said to his father, "Give this executioner my new garment which you had got for me to wear on joining the service. Thus I shall receive you," he added, with a reference to the Lord's promise to those who should forsake fathers for His sake, "I shall receive you an hundredfold, and we shall rejoice together with the Lord." His death was instantaneous. His mother, Pompeiana, received the body from the magistrate, and laid it in her own bedroom; then carried it to Carthage and buried it, "under the hill near the palace,"—or more probably "near the square"—close by the grave of the martyr Cyprian. A fortnight later, the mother herself died, and was buried in the same spot. "His father, Victor," adds the simple and

touching record, "returned to his home with great joy, giving thanks to God that he had sent such a gift before him to the Lord, and determined to follow after." <sup>1</sup>

At Tangier, the birthday of the emperor was being observed by the troops with feasting and sacrifices, when Marcellus, a centurion of the Trajan legion, horrified at some feature in the ceremonies that seems to have been new to him, rose up and, standing before the eagles of the legion, threw off his military belt, and solemnly cried with a loud voice, "I am a soldier of Jesus Christ, the King eternal." Then casting away the centurion's vine-stick and his weapons, he added, "From this moment I cease to be a soldier of your emperors ; and as for worshipping your gods of wood and stone, I despise them. They are deaf and dumb idols. If the terms of the service are such that we are forced to sacrifice to the gods and to the emperors, see, I throw away my vine-stick and my belt ; I renounce the standards and refuse to serve."

The soldiers who heard him sat for a while astonished ; then they arrested him, and reported the occurrence to the commanding officer, called Fortunatus, who ordered him to be put in prison. When the festival was ended, Fortunatus took his seat on the bench and sent for Marcellus. "What was it," he asked, "that made you unbuckle your belt contrary to military regulations, and throw it and your vine-stick away?" Marcellus answered by a plain statement of what he had done, and of the reasons which he had given at the time. Fortunatus said, "It is impossible for me to pretend that I am unacquainted with your rash conduct. I shall there-

<sup>1</sup> Ruinart, p. 263 ; Knopf, *Ausgew. Märtyreracten*, p. 79.



fore refer the matter to the emperors and to the Cæsar. You shall yourself be sent unhurt to my lord Aurelius Agricolanus, the deputy prefect of the Prætorium."

On the 30th of October, Marcellus appeared before Agricolanus. The letter of Fortunatus was read, rehearsing the charge brought against him. "This soldier," ran one sentence in the letter, "throwing away his military belt, avowed himself a Christian, and before all the people uttered many injurious words against the gods and against Cæsar." Asked whether he had said what he was charged with saying, Marcellus replied that it was true. "Were you serving as an ordinary centurion?" said the magistrate. "I was." "How came you to be so mad as to abjure your oath and speak like that?" "There is no madness in those who fear the Lord." "Did you say the very words which are given in detail in the commandant's report?" "I did." "Did you throw away your weapons?" "I did. It was not proper for a Christian man, who is in the service of the Lord Christ, to serve the troublesome things of the world."

The case was perfectly clear. Such a breach of discipline could not be passed over. Agricolanus had no choice but to dictate the sentence: "Marcellus, who was serving as an ordinary centurion, and who publicly abjured his oath, saying that he was polluted by it, and uttered other words full of madness contained in the commandant's report, is condemned to be beheaded." As he was led away to die, Marcellus said to Agricolanus, "God bless you." "That," says the ancient record, "was the proper way for a martyr to leave the world."

A man named Cassian, doubtless already a Christian,

was acting as military secretary to Agricolanus. It was his duty to take notes of the trial, and to write down the sentence dictated by the magistrate. But when he heard Marcellus condemned to die, Cassian threw his pen and his ledger upon the ground, and expressed aloud his detestation. Marcellus laughed for joy. The magistrate was not unnaturally annoyed. He sprang from his seat and asked for an explanation. Cassian answered that the sentence which he was required to take down was an unjust sentence. Agricolanus could not permit such a contempt of court, and ordered him to be committed at once to prison. He came up for trial on the 3rd of December, made answers like those of Marcellus, and was joined to his fellow Christian in a similar martyrdom.<sup>1</sup>

It is, perhaps, with good reason that recent scholars refer to this same period a group of martyrdoms which took place, apparently, at Dorostorum in the province of Moesia, in what is now called Bulgaria.

There were two soldiers named Nicander and Marcian, who had won promotion in the army, but were expected to comply with some religious usage in order to take it up. This they were unable to do, as they had lately become Christians. The governor of the province, who bore the name of Maximus, called them up, and said, "If you are acquainted with the orders of the emperors, which require you to sacrifice to the gods, step up and obey the orders." "It is only required," Nicander answered, "of those who are willing to sacrifice. We are Christians, and cannot be bound by such a requirement." Maximus pointed out that by refusing they would lose the increased pay to which their promotion entitled them,

<sup>1</sup> Ruinart, pp. 265, 267 ; Knopf, p. 82.

and asked why they should incur the loss. "Because," answered Nicander, "the riches of the ungodly are a pollution to men who desire to serve God." "You need only honour the gods with a grain of incense," the governor pleaded. Nicander replied, "How can a Christian man worship stocks and stones, and forsake the everlasting God whom we worship, who made all things of nothing, and who is able to save both me and all who trust in Him?"

The wife of Nicander was present. She was a woman of the name of Daria, whom the wars had long separated from her husband, and who was now rejoicing in his return to her. With the intensity of a Christian woman's love she set herself to encourage her husband in his resolution. Addressing him with that respectful title which St. Peter approved on the lips of Sarah, she said, "My lord, take good heed that you do it not. Take good heed, my lord, that you deny not our Lord Jesus Christ. Look up to heaven, and you will there see Him to whom you are bound in loyalty and conscience. He is your helper." Maximus, the governor, heard some of these remarks. "You bad woman," he exclaimed, "why do you wish your husband to die?" "That he may live with God," she replied, "and never die." "No, no," said the governor; "it is nothing of the sort; you want to be married to a finer specimen of a husband, and so are in haste to get this one out of existence." "If you imagine that such a thing is in my mind, and that I mean to do as you say," the brave woman answered, "kill me first for Christ's sake,—if," she added, "you have been told to do that with women as well as with men." It was not a time of general persecution. "I have had no instructions to proceed in that way against women," the

governor answered, "and I shall certainly not do what you wish ; but you shall go to prison."

As soon as Daria was gone, Maximus went on with his attempts to persuade her husband. He begged him to pay no heed to his wife or any other such adviser. "If you like," he said, "you can take time to think over the question whether it is better to live or to die." Nicander answered, "You may consider the time which you offer me as finished. I assure you that I have gone into the matter and am persuaded that the one thing to care about is how to be saved." The good-natured governor understood him in the sense of being saved from bodily death, and thought that Nicander was prepared to sacrifice. "Thank God," he cried ; and turning on his heel, he began to walk up and down with one of the members of his judicial council, in a state of high satisfaction. "I too thank God," replied Nicander. To the Christians who watched him he appeared to be "in the spirit," like St. John in the Apocalypse. Thanksgivings poured from his lips, and prayers that he might be delivered from the stains of this world of temptation. The governor heard him. "You said but now that you wished to live," he remarked ; "do you now desire again to die?" "I wish," answered Nicander, "to live the eternal life, not the temporal life of this world. That is why I put my body in your power. Do what you like ; I am a Christian."

All this time Marcian had been silent and unquestioned. The governor now addressed him : "What do you say, Marcian ?" he enquired. "I say the same as my fellow-soldier," he replied. Maximus answered, "You shall be thrust into prison together, then, and shall assuredly suffer the penalty."

Twenty days were spent in prison. Then the two



men were again brought to the bar. Maximus asked them whether they had had time enough to consider the question of obeying the imperial orders. The task of answering fell upon Marcian. "The multitude of your words," he said, "will not make us abandon our faith or deny God. He is with us. We see Him, and we know what He is calling us to. Do not detain us. Our faith in Christ is perfected to-day. Despatch us quickly that we may see the Crucified, whom you heathens do not hesitate to curse with your wicked lips, but whom we Christians revere and worship." "Very well," answered Maximus; "you shall be delivered to death as you desire." "By the health of the emperors," said Marcian, "we entreat you to despatch us quickly. It is not the fear of your tortures," he added, "that makes us adjure you thus, but the wish to attain quickly the object of our desire." Maximus wished to part on good terms with the men whom he condemned. "The order which you disobey," he said, "is not of my making. I am no persecutor of yours. It is the command of the emperors, with which I have nothing to do. I am clean from your blood. If," he added, perhaps somewhat wistfully, "you know that you are going on a good journey, I congratulate you. May your desire be accomplished." So saying, he pronounced the capital sentence upon them. The two martyrs exclaimed with one voice, as to a Christian friend, "Peace be with you, kind governor."

They went their way rejoicing and blessing God, attended by their friends. Nicander's wife was there, and with her a man named Papian, whose brother Pasicrates had suffered martyrdom a short time before. Papian carried in his arms the infant son of Nicander and his wife. Marcian's wife with her child was also



there, but not in the same serene exaltation as Daria. She was either a heathen, or more probably a nominal Christian. Her garment was torn, and as they went along she raised loud laments. "I told you in the prison," she cried, "that this was what it would come to. I was afraid it would be so, and I shed many tears for it. Woe is me! will you not answer me? Take pity on me, my lord. Look at your darling little son. Turn your face towards us; do not disown us. Why are you so hasty? Whither are you going? Why do you hate us? You have been carried off like a sheep to the slaughter." Marcian at length turned to the poor woman, and eyed her sternly. "How long," he said, "has Satan blinded your mind and soul? Go your way and let me go mine. Allow me to perfect my martyrdom for God." A Christian named Zoticus seized Marcian's hand, and cheered him on. "Be of good courage, *domine frater*," he said; "you have fought a good fight. How shall we weak ones gain such faith? Remember the promises which the Lord has made, and which He will so soon pay. Perfect Christians are you indeed: blessed are you." The unhappy wife was still following with her cries, attempting to hold Marcian back. "Hold my wife," said Marcian to Zoticus; and Zoticus did so.

When they came to the spot, the spirit of the martyr relented a little. Looking round about him, he saw Zoticus in the crowd and, calling him to his side, he begged him to bring his wife to him. Then, kissing her, he said, "Depart in the Lord. You cannot bear to see me celebrate my martyrdom, with your mind beguiled by the evil one." He kissed his child, and looking up to heaven he said, "Lord God Almighty, take Thou care of him." Then the two

martyrs embraced one another, and stepped a few paces apart to be put to death. At that moment, however, Marcian cast another glance around him, and saw the wife of Nicander vainly endeavouring to get to her husband through the crowd. Stretching out his hand to her, while the people made way for him, he brought her to Nicander. "God be with you," said the husband. "Be of good courage, good my lord," said the wife. "Show them how you can strive. I spent ten years at home without you, and there was not a moment when I was not wishing to God that I might see you. Now I have seen you, and I am glad that you are setting out for the land of life. I shall sing louder now. How proud I shall be, to be a martyr's wife! Be of good courage, my lord. Bear your witness to God, that you may deliver me also from everlasting death." Such confidence had the Christians of those days in the power of a martyr's prayers. Handkerchiefs were bound round the eyes of Nicander and Marcian, and in a moment the skilled stroke of the sword sent them where they desired to be.<sup>1</sup>

This was not the only case of Christianity with which the humane Maximus was called to deal. About a month earlier, as it seems, a veteran named Julius was brought before him. "What do you say, Julius?" he asked; "is the charge against you true?" "Yes," said the veteran; "I am a Christian. I will not say that I am anything but what I am." "What then? Did you not know of the order of the emperors, prescribing sacrifice to the gods?" "Yes, I knew," said Julius; "but I am a Christian, and cannot do what you wish. It would not be right for me to deny the living and true God." "What is there so very serious," argued the governor,

<sup>1</sup> Ruinart, p. 484.

"in offering some incense, and going your way?" "I cannot go beyond the commandment of God," said Julius, "and obey unbelievers. In that unprofitable service, in which I went up and down for six and twenty years, I was never court-martialled for misconduct or breach of discipline. Seven times I was engaged in active service, and never disputed the orders of those above me, nor did I fight worse than anybody else. The commanding officer never once found fault with me. And do you think that I, who was faithful in that which was worse, am likely to be unfaithful in what is better?" "What service have you seen?" asked Maximus. "I served my time under arms," answered Julius, "and fought in the wars in my rank even when I was entitled to retire; but all the while I worshipped the living God who made heaven and earth, and to this day I still pay Him faithful service."

Maximus, who was capable of recognising excellence, and anxious to befriend it, said, "Julius, I see that you are a sensible and a serious man. Take my advice therefore, and sacrifice to the gods." "I will not do as you desire," said Julius, "nor run into sin and eternal punishment." "If you think that sin," said the magistrate, "let it be laid to my charge. I will apply force to you, that it may not look as if you had complied willingly. Then you can go home with no further anxiety. You will receive the money distributed at the tenth year of the reign, and nobody will trouble you any more." The offer was all the more seductive because it was so kindly intended; but Julius saw behind the indulgent governor the evil power which spoke through him. "Neither that money of Satan," he exclaimed, "nor your crafty persuasion can draw me away from the eternal Lord.

I cannot deny God. Give sentence against me, therefore, as a Christian." "Unless you will be obedient to the imperial orders and sacrifice," said Maximus, "I will cut your head off." Julius was delighted at this change of language. "That is a good thought," he cried : "I beseech you, religious governor, by the health of the emperors, to put it in execution, and to give sentence upon me, that my desires may be fulfilled." "If you do not change your mind and sacrifice," answered Maximus, "you shall be delivered over to your desire." "I shall thank you," said Julius, "if you will but do it." "You are in such a hurry to die," said Maximus ; "you think that you will suffer for some praiseworthy object." Julius answered, "If I am permitted to suffer thus, everlasting glory will await me." "If you were suffering for your country and for the laws," said the governor, "you would have everlasting praise." "It is indeed for the laws that I shall suffer," replied the martyr, "but for the laws of God." "Laws," retorted Maximus, "which were bequeathed to you by a dead man who was crucified. See what a fool you are, to make more of a dead man than of the live emperors." "He died for our sins," answered Julius solemnly, "that He might bestow upon us eternal life ; but He is God who endureth for ever, and whosoever confesses Him shall have eternal life, and whosoever denies Him, everlasting punishment." "I am sorry for you," said Maximus, "and I advise you to sacrifice and live with us." "If I live with you," was the reply, "it is death to me ; but if I die, I live." "Hear me," said Maximus once more, "and sacrifice, or, as I promised you, I shall put you to death." "That is what I have asked again and again," Julius answered, "if I may be counted worthy that you should do it." Maximus said, "You

have chosen death rather than life." "I have chosen," said the Christian, "death for the moment and then life everlasting." The sentence was then pronounced. "Julius, who refuses to obey the orders of the emperors, is to receive capital punishment."

On coming to the place where executions were generally performed, all the Christians gave Julius the kiss of peace. The martyr perhaps thought how his Master had received a kiss from a traitor. "Let each one," he cried, "take heed how he gives the kiss." Among the other Christians present was one called Hesychius, himself a soldier like Julius and like Nicander and Marcian. He was even then in custody, and perhaps Maximus had thought that it would be good for him to see the realities of martyrdom. Hesychius cried aloud to Julius, "I entreat you, Julius, to fulfil with joy what you have undertaken, and receive the crown which the Lord promised to those who confess Him; and remember me, for I am about to follow you. Bear my best greetings also to those servants of God, Pasirates and Valention, who by a good confession have gone before us to the Lord." Julius, embracing Hesychius, answered, "Brother, make haste and come. Those whom you greeted have already heard your message." With these words Julius took the handkerchief and bound his own eyes. Then, stretching out his neck, he said, "O Lord Jesus Christ, for whose name's sake I suffer thus, vouchsafe to set my spirit among Thy saints." So he was beheaded.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ruinart, p. 482; *Analecta Bollandiana*, x. 50.



## CHAPTER XII

### HADRIAN AND NATALIA; LUCIAN; THEODOTUS

SUCH occurrences as these were a prelude to the great persecution which broke out in the year 303. In the early morning of February 23 in that year, a band of officials was sent forth to destroy the fine church at Nicomedia, now Ismid, on the Sea of Marmora, which was at that time the capital of the empire, where Diocletian and his son-in-law Galerius had been in conference together all the winter. Next day an imperial edict was posted in the city to announce that all Christian churches were immediately to be levelled to the ground, and of course all assemblies of Christians prohibited, that all copies of the Christian Scriptures were to be burned, that all Christians who held official positions were to be outlawed, and all private Christians reduced to slavery, while Christians who were slaves already were pronounced incapable of emancipation. It was Diocletian's express wish that in extirpating Christianity no blood should be shed. He knew what had happened in earlier persecutions. "As a rule," he said, "the Christians are only too happy to die." His own repression of Christianity was to be conducted on milder principles. But the very first utterance of them drew Christian blood. A gentleman of Nicomedia openly strode up to the pillar to which the edict was affixed tore the paper down, and rent it in pieces. Shortly

before, high-flown proclamations had been displayed, announcing an imperial triumph over the barbarians of the northern frontier. "Look," he cried; "new victories over the Goths and the Sarmatians!" He was immediately arrested for his defiant act, and, after tortures, was roasted to death.<sup>1</sup>

Such measures were not enough to satisfy the fanatical Galerius. A fire broke out in the palace shortly after the promulgation of the edict. Constantine, who was on the spot at the time, ascribed the fire to lightning sent by the judgment of God. Lactantius, who was living at Nicomedia, says that it was kindled by the orders of Galerius himself. At any rate Galerius used it as a weapon against the Christians. He accused them of attempting to burn himself and Diocletian alive. The elder emperor was very angry, and had his servants put to the torture to find out the cause of the fire, but nothing was discovered. A fortnight later another fire was discovered. In a storm of real or feigned indignation, Galerius took his departure, saying that he had no intention of staying at Nicomedia to be burned by the Christians.

The second fire produced the desired effect. Diocletian went to work in earnest with the Christians around him. All were called upon to sacrifice. His daughter Valeria, and his wife Prisca, were the first to be summoned. They were not ready to be martyrs, and they sacrificed. The Christian servants proved more staunch. A youth of the name of Peter was brought into an open place in the midst of the city, and, on his refusal to sacrifice, was stripped naked and raised aloft, and scourged in the sight of all, until his bones began to show through the skin. It was hoped that when

<sup>1</sup> Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum*, 13.

his strength failed he would mechanically comply with the orders given him, in spite of himself. But Peter was inflexible. When his wounds became numb and lost feeling, they brought salt and vinegar and rubbed it into them ; but it had no effect upon Peter. Then a gridiron was sent for, and they laid him upon it, like Lawrence, over a slow fire, but Peter expired on his gridiron without a word or act of disloyalty to Christ. Others of the household were handled after the same fashion. The chief chamberlain, named Dorotheus, who had been the prop and mainstay of the palace, and had been more like a son to Diocletian than a servant, was quietly strangled, together with another chamberlain, Gorgonius. The poor bodies were buried by the surviving Christians ; but Diocletian, who probably knew something of the inspiration which Christians drew from their visits to the martyrs' burying-places, ordered the remains to be dug up again and flung into the sea.<sup>1</sup>

There was as yet no edict of persecution to touch the life of Christians in general, and Diocletian was still anxious not to shed more blood than he could help ; but, following to some extent the example of Valerian, he now put forth an edict which ordered that all the clergy of the Church—bishops, priests, deacons, and even those of still lower rank—should be cast into prison. There they remained, those who were arrested, until the following December. On the 21st of that month, 303—or, according to Lactantius, on the 20th of the preceding month—the emperor Diocletian kept the twentieth anniversary of his accession. In accordance with a common custom, he proclaimed that the prisons should be emptied on that occasion ; and that even

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* viii. 6, cp. 13.

those prisoners who were Christians should be released, on condition of sacrificing first. If they were unwilling to sacrifice, torture might be applied to induce them to do so. Three or four months later, in March or April 304, when Diocletian was incapacitated by illness from taking part in the work of government, his colleague, Maximian, put forth an edict that all Christians, wherever found, were to be compelled to sacrifice in public, or upon refusal were to die.

In the following year, Diocletian and Maximian, according to their long-formed intention, abdicated their sovereignty and retired into private life. Their places were taken by Galerius and Constantius, with Maximin and Severus for their Caesars. In the western half of the empire the persecution ceased; but in the eastern half it continued, differing in intensity in different provinces and at different periods. In the year 308 came the first signs of a relaxation on the part of the supreme authorities. Orders were given to inflict the sentence of death more sparingly; but the humanity which dictated this decree betrayed itself by prescribing that dreadful mutilations should take the place of death, and hundreds of unfortunate Christians were condemned to lose an eye or a foot, and in this miserable condition were set to work in the mines and quarries, as slaves of the imperial treasury. At last, in 311, when Galerius lay dying of a horrible disease, he published a strange edict of toleration, in which he began by explaining why the persecution had been undertaken, then confessed that it had completely failed of its object, and ended by requesting the Christians to pray for him.

The city of Nicomedia, which had felt the first rigours of the long persecution, continued throughout to be worthy of its good beginning. There, at the very

seat of empire, the law was for the most part observed according to the letter, and martyrdoms were at first few. One way in which the law was observed told hard upon the Christians. The magistrates arranged to have altars standing in their offices and in the courts of justice, and, before any one was allowed to bring or defend an action, he was required to prove himself to be no Christian by sacrificing. If he refused, he forfeited the protection and assistance of the law. Short of death, the Christians of the place showed a noble example. There was one, an African (as it appears) by birth, named Donatus, to whom Lactantius dedicated his History of the persecution, who passed through the hands of three successive governors of Bithynia, and was tortured by them all in turn. Nine several times they tortured him. Stripes, the iron claw, the fire, and the knife were all tried upon him in vain. "For six years the prison," as Lactantius says, "was his home." At last the toleration edict opened his prison doors, and he came forth into liberty once more, and with him a number of other brave confessors.<sup>1</sup>

Upon the arrival of Galerius on one occasion at Nicomedia, a body of three and twenty confessors had borne striking testimony to their faith, when a young man, who was the chief of the *officium* (as it was called), that is, of the officials in attendance upon the magistrate who examined them, was so powerfully impressed by what he saw, that he asked of them the secret of their courage. It was a not infrequent occurrence in the history of martyrdom. This young man's name was Hadrian. The dauntless three and twenty were brought before Galerius in person; and when the emperor, incensed at an answer of theirs, called upon

<sup>1</sup> Lactantius, *De Mortibus Pers.*, 15, 16, 35.



his *officium* to make a note of it, Hadrian stepped forth and said, "Make a note of my name among theirs: I too am a Christian." "Are you mad?" asked Galerius; "do you also wish to throw your life away?" "I am not mad, sir," Hadrian replied; "I was once mad, but have come now to a right mind." "Do not talk," said Galerius; "but beg my pardon. Say in the presence of all that what you said was a mistake. Your answer shall be erased from the minutes of the court." "No," said Hadrian; "from henceforth I will ask pardon of God for my evil deeds and for the errors of my life past."

Hadrian was thrown into prison with the other confessors. He had been married a little more than a year to a lady of the name of Natalia. His wife was of Christian parentage, and was overjoyed at his conversion. She visited him and his fellow Christians in the prison, and ministered to their wants, encouraging Hadrian to persevere in his confession. He promised that he would let her know when his final trial was to take place.

It is said that when the day was fixed, he persuaded the gaolers to release him, on the security given by his fellow-prisoners that he would return in proper time. He went accordingly home; but his wife was terrified at the sight of him, thinking that he must have purchased freedom by apostasy. She was only reassured when he told her that he had come in fulfilment of his promise, and that his trial was at hand.

Galerius took his seat, and ordered the Christians to be produced in court, stripped to the waist for torture. The others, who had been tortured before, were so crippled and lacerated that they could not move; and on the advice of the officials, Galerius gave orders

that Hadrian should be brought in first. He came, carrying with his own hands the "hobby-horse" on which he was to be tortured. Natalia was there to keep him true to his profession. "Do you persist in your madness," asked the terrible Galerius, "and wish to make a bad departure from this life?" Hadrian answered as before, that his days of madness were over, and that he was prepared to pour his life out. "Will you not sacrifice, then, nor worship the gods, as I do myself, and as every one else does?" "You are in error," Hadrian boldly answered. "Why do you draw others into error, destroying both yourself and all this people, whom you persuade to worship gods which have no life, and to forsake the God who made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein?" "Do you think our gods to be so little," asked the emperor, "when they are great?" "I do not think them to be either great or little," was the answer; "they are nothing at all."

Galerius bade the officials beat him with rods, and to keep repeating, as they did so, "Do not blaspheme the gods." At this signal, Natalia slipped from the court, found her way to the cell of the other confessors, and told them that her husband's martyrdom was begun, and sought their prayers for his support. Her husband, meanwhile, replying to the emperor's command, remarked, "If I am tortured thus for blaspheming those that are no gods, what shall you have to bear for blaspheming the living and true God?" Galerius condescended to reply, "You learned that language from those impostors." "Why," answered the man in torture, "do you call them impostors, who are our guides to eternal life? Rather it is you who deceive people, and bring them into the snares of destruction."

The beating was made more severe ; and after a time Galerius pursued, "Come now, acknowledge the gods, and spare yourself and your youth." Hadrian was about eight and twenty years of age. "Why," said the emperor, "do you so wantonly destroy yourself? I swear to you by the great gods that I cannot look on such a fine young man without pity." "I am sparing myself," said Hadrian; "I do not wish to perish altogether." "Acknowledge the gods, then," Galerius urged, "that they may be favourable to you and restore you with honour to your former station. You are not like those others who were imprisoned with you. You are the son of a well-born and honourable man, and though you are young, you deserve promotion. Those others are poor creatures, of unhealthy peasant origin." But Hadrian would not be separated from his new friends. "I dare say," he answered, "that you know about my home and family and ancestors ; but if you knew the family of those holy men, and their wealth, and the home that they are looking for, you would throw yourself instantly at their feet, and beg them to pray for you ; and, moreover, you would break your gods with your own hands."

Hadrian was turned over, and beaten on the belly. After a while, the emperor told the beaters to stop. The delicately nurtured body could not bear much more. "You see," said the emperor, "how I wish to spare you. If you will only call upon the gods with your voice"—he meant, without performing any sacrificial act—"I will have physicians brought at once to attend to your wounds, and you shall be with me to-day in my palace." Hadrian replied that he would do so, if the gods would promise with their own lips to do what Galerius had said that they would do for him. "What,"

said the emperor, "they cannot speak." "Why, then," rejoined the Christian, "do you sacrifice to things which cannot speak?"

He was removed again to the prison; and there, with some, at any rate, of the other confessors, had his wrists and ankles broken with a rod of iron. It is said that Natalia held his poor hands upon the block while it was done. Mortification set in, and Hadrian died in his prison. The young widow—so the story runs—who was a woman of wealth and of property, was forced to flee to Byzantium to escape the attentions of an officer of the town who desired to marry her. She carried with her, as her chief treasure, the hand of her martyred husband, embalmed, and wrapped in a purple covering, which she always kept at her bed's head.<sup>1</sup>

The sufferings of the celebrated Saint Euphemia are recorded for us in an interesting fashion in an oration of Asterius, Bishop of Amasea, who vividly describes a series of pictures which adorned the church at Chalcedon, erected in her honour upon the very site of her martyrdom—the church in which the fourth Ecumenical Council was afterwards held. Chalcedon was in Bithynia, some fifty miles from Nicomedia. As Asterius' oration was delivered before the end of the fourth century, and the picture does not seem to have been newly painted when he described it, the picture may be considered good evidence for the story which it tells.

The first scene depicted is this. "The judge sits on a lofty throne, looking with a fierce countenance upon the virgin. With him there are magistrates, attendants, and a number of soldiers. There are also two secretaries holding tablet and pencil: one of them,

<sup>1</sup> *Acta Sanctorum*, Sept. 8.

lifting his hand from the wax, looks intently at the virgin standing at the bar, bending his face towards her as if asking her to speak louder, lest he should mis-report her and get into trouble for it. The virgin stands there in a black dress, with the *pallium* of a philosopher over it. Two soldiers present her to the governor, the one in front pulling her, the other pushing her from behind. The virgin's bearing shows a mixture of modesty and firmness. She is bending forward, with her eyes downcast, as if shrinking from the stare of the men, but she is not at all dismayed, and has no timidity about the encounter.

"In the next scene, a couple of executioners are already plying their task, stripped naked, except for a light tunic. One has seized her head and bent it backwards, so as to place the virgin's cheek conveniently for the other to torture her. The other stands over her and breaks her teeth. Instruments of torture, the mallet and the screw, appear. So vividly has the artist's brush depicted the blood, that you think that it is streaming from her lips, and turn away with a groan.

"Once more, the prison ; and once more the pure virgin sitting there, in black garments, and all alone. Both her hands are stretched towards heaven, appealing to God to help her in her need. Over her head, as she prays, appears the sign which Christians worship and represent—the symbol, I doubt not, of her approaching passion.

"A little later, in another compartment, the painter has kindled a mighty fire, with thick red flames issuing here and there. In the midst of it he has placed Euphemia, stretching her hands towards heaven, but with no trace of sadness upon her countenance—



nothing but joy at passing to the life of disembodied bliss." <sup>1</sup>

When Maximin, the successor of Galerius, took up his abode at Nicomedia after the death of that emperor, and revived for a time the bloody strife with Christianity, that city became the headquarters of the expiring persecution. Maximin seems purposely to have directed his attention to the destruction of the theologians of the Church. Thither the great scholar, Lucian of Antioch, was sent to be examined by the emperor himself. Lucian, a native of the same town as the witty satirist of that name who ridiculed the Christian martyrs of the time of Trajan, and perhaps a member of the same family, had spent a lifetime in the work of biblical criticism. His learned revision of the Septuagint was received as the standard text of the Greek Bible by all the churches of Syria, Asia Minor, and European Greece. Upon his arrival at Nicomedia he was invited to make a speech in his own defence before the emperor Maximin in person. A part of it is still preserved.

"It is no secret," he said, "that the God whom we Christians worship is one God, who was preached to us by Christ, and who is breathed into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. We are not, as you suppose, the victims of some erroneous human persuasion, nor are we, as others are, the blind followers of an ancestral tradition which has never been submitted to criticism. Our authority for what we believe about God is God Himself. Such great and transcendent conceptions could never have entered into the thoughts of men, if they had not been brought home to us by the power of His own Spirit, and revealed by the teaching of His own Word and Wisdom.

<sup>1</sup> Asterius, *Orat.* xi. ; Ruinart, p. 431.

“I confess that we ourselves were once in error, and thought that the images which our own hands had made were gods, the creators of heaven and earth ; but their claims were refuted by the consecration which we ourselves bestowed upon their perishable materials. Whatever measure of devotion they received was in proportion to the beauty which they derived from the artist’s hand. But the Almighty God, who was made by no hands of ours, but whose handiwork we are, pitying our human errors, sent His own Wisdom into this world clothed in flesh, to teach us that the God who made heaven and earth was not to be sought for in the work of men’s hands, but in the realm of the eternal and the unseen. He gave us also laws for life and rules of discipline—that we should avoid luxury, welcome poverty, cultivate a meek temper, carefully promote peace, love purity of heart, maintain endurance. All that you are now doing to us, He foretold to us. He said that we should be brought before kings, and set at the judgment seat of governors, and slaughtered like animals for sacrifice.”

Some years before Lucian was brought to Nicomedia, a new weapon against Christianity had been forged. A little book was composed which professed to contain the true and official account of our Lord’s trial before Pilate. It doubtless showed Him to have been guilty of many crimes for which He was justly sentenced to death. These Acts of Pilate obtained a very wide circulation ; and during the last year or so, Maximin had ordered that copies should be displayed in public places for people to read, and had even commanded that all schools should be provided with them, and that the school children should learn them by heart, and be examined in them, and compose rhetorical

exercises upon them. To this abominable fiction Lucian referred in his speech before Maximin.

“Immortal as He was by nature,” Lucian said, “because He was the Word and Wisdom of God, He gave Himself up to die, that He might give us in His incarnate life an example of endurance. We, to whom He showed Himself alive from the dead after three days, were under no false impressions about His death. He did not die such a death as those forged modern Acts of Pilate assert ; but innocent, pure, and spotless, He submitted to death for this purpose and this only—that He might overcome death by His resurrection.”

So Lucian bore his testimony, in the face of the emperor Maximin himself, as St. Paul bore testimony before Nero. But Maximin was not persuaded. Lucian was beheaded, but in the privacy of his prison. A few days before his death, he wrote a farewell letter to the church at Antioch, of which he was a presbyter. He told them of many others who were associated in the same suffering as himself. Among them was Anthimus, the Bishop of Nicomedia, whose life had been spared during all the previous eight years of terror. “A whole choir of martyrs,” he wrote, “salute you all at once ; and I tell you the good tidings that Pope Anthimus has just been perfected by the course of martyrdom.”<sup>1</sup>

If the law was strictly observed round Nicomedia, in the neighbouring provinces scruples of that kind seem soon to have been cast aside. Shiploads of Christians were taken out to sea and sunk. There was a town in Phrygia where the entire population had become Christian, including the civil and military authorities. Whether it was feared that an insurrection would take

<sup>1</sup> Routh, *Reliquiae Sacrae*, iv. 5 ; cp. Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* viii. 6.

place there when the moment came for demolishing the church, cannot now be told ; but a regiment of soldiers was sent to the place, who surrounded it on every side, set fire to it, and burned not only the church, as the edict ordered, but the whole town, with all the men, women, and children that it contained.<sup>1</sup>

It was not wonderful that in such circumstances the Christians themselves occasionally lost their heads and behaved rashly and unbecomingly. At Amasea, the capital of Pontus, there was a young soldier of the name of Theodore, known to the Church by the title of Theodore the Tiro, that is, the Recruit. He was of humble origin, a native of Syria, and, having only lately joined the army, occupied no prominent position in "the legion of the Marmarites," to which he belonged. On some occasion Theodore made it plain that he was a Christian, and was accordingly brought before the governor of the province and the officer in command of the troops. On being asked why he would not sacrifice to the gods, he answered, "I know nothing of gods. You are wrong in giving the name of gods to seducing devils. My God is Christ, the only begotten Son of God." An officer who had a reputation for wit interposed and asked him scoffingly how God came to have a Son. Theodore replied like a well-instructed Christian that the generation of the Son of God is not like human generation, and retorted upon his questioner by a reference to the worship for which Amasea was famous—the worship of the Mother of all the gods, which he condemned in no measured and, we may add, in no undeserved terms.

The authorities were not anxious to be hard upon Theodore. They gave him time to think things over.

<sup>1</sup> Lactantius, *Instit. Div.* v. 11 ; Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* viii. 11.

They did not even place him under arrest. The temple of the Mother of the gods stood in the middle of the city, on the bank of the river Iris. Theodore made use of his liberty to go that night to the temple and to set it on fire. He made no concealment of what he had done, but gloried in his destruction of the scene of a hideous idolatry. It is said that the authorities even then were forbearing enough to promise him not only pardon but promotion if he would sacrifice. But Theodore answered with words of outrage not only against the gods but against the emperors. The magistrates tortured him, but amidst his tortures Theodore the Recruit kept singing the verse, "I will always give thanks unto the Lord ; His praise shall ever be in my mouth." A short but merry imprisonment ended in a death by fire.<sup>1</sup>

The government of the province of Galatia was entrusted to a man named Theotecnus, who was himself an apostate from Christianity. He had already gained a reputation for skill and firmness in dealing with his former co-religionists, and even the knowledge that he was coming to the province caused many Christians to take flight. Those who remained prepared themselves for the worst.

Soon after his arrival a man named Victor was arrested for speaking words that reflected upon the crimes attributed in heathen mythology to the gods. Every effort was used to make Victor abandon his faith. Promises of worldly advantage in case of compliance, and dreadful threats of what refusal would involve, were employed in turn. Victor remained steadfast, and bore the beginning of his

<sup>1</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Oratio de S. Theodoro Martyre* ; *Analecta Bolland.* ii. p. 359 ; Conybeare, *Monuments*, p. 220.



tortures in a way that won the admiration of all beholders. But when his trials were almost over, and he was on the point of receiving his crown, he sent a message to the governor, asking for a short space for deliberation. The beating which he was undergoing was at once stopped, and the man was taken back to his prison. Victor died in the prison as the effect of what he had gone through, leaving it doubtful whether he was to be reckoned with the martyrs or with the renegades.

The chief part in encouraging Victor to remain firm was borne by a man called Theodotus, whose history forms one of the most curious and interesting records of the time. Theodotus kept an eating-house in Ancyra, the capital of Galatia ; and one way in which he made use of his business to serve the purposes of the Christian Church was this :—Theotecnus had given orders that every article of food or drink that was sold in the city should be defiled by being offered to idols, or by contact with something that had been offered. He made a special point of treating in this way all bread and wine, hoping thus to strike a blow at the Sacrament which he knew to be the mainstay of the Church. Theodotus found means to sell to Christian customers what he had bought from Christian tradespeople, and in this way secured that there should always be unpolluted elements at hand for the celebration of the Christian mysteries. The victualler's shop, says Nilus, his biographer, became to the faithful of Ancyra what the Ark was in the time of Noah's Flood ; no one could be saved except by it.

One day a curious adventure happened to Theodotus. He had gone to a place on the banks of the river Halys, about forty miles from Ancyra, where

he fell in with a party of Christians whom he had formerly befriended. They made a little picnic in a wooded glade, and sent some of their company to the village hard by to invite the priest of the place to join them. The church of this remote village had escaped destruction, and the priest, whose name was Fronto, was just coming out of it after the hour of prayer. When the repast was ended, Theodotus remarked with a smile that the place was a suitable place for bestowing a martyr's relics, and asked Fronto why he was doing nothing. "Ah!" answered the good man, "put me in the way to get some relics, and then find fault with me for doing nothing. First get your relics, I say, and then think of building." He spoke in jest; but Theodotus drew his ring from his finger, and, giving it to the priest, promised that he would find him some relics, and so returned to Ancyra.

There he found everything in confusion, as if there had been an earthquake. Seven Christian virgins, some of them of an advanced age, had been seized by Theotecnus, who, after being foiled in an outrageous attempt upon the purity of their lives, decided to make an example of them in another way. A yearly festival came round, when it was the custom to bathe the images of Artemis and Athena in a lake near the city. The images were taken in procession in chariots, accompanied by an excited crowd. Theotecnus placed the seven unfortunate women in chariots, in a standing position, with no clothes to cover them, and made them go in this procession in front of the idols. He himself took part in the frantic ceremony. Upon arriving at the lake, Theotecnus argued with his victims, but to no purpose. The heathen priestesses drew near and offered them garlands and white raiment, if they

would take part in the bathing of the images. When they indignantly refused, the governor had stones hung round their necks ; they were rowed out into deep water and drowned. Soldiers were stationed to guard the lake lest the bodies should be recovered by the Christians.

Theodotus meanwhile, who had been brought up by one of the seven, had been praying earnestly and incessantly for them, that their faith might carry them through. In the deep darkness of the next night but one, Theodotus, with some companions, was able to evade the guards and to get possession of the dead bodies, severing the ropes which fastened them to the stones by means of a sharp scythe. The next morning, however, it was discovered that the bodies had been stolen. One of those who had assisted Theodotus in the work was imprudent enough to venture into the city to gratify his curiosity, and was soon detected. On being brought before Theotecnus and threatened with tortures and death, he confessed that Theodotus had led the party, and what they had done with the bodies, which the governor immediately fetched and burned.

When Theodotus heard this, he bade farewell to the friends about him, and betook himself straight to the court where the formidable governor was sitting, surrounded by the implements of persecution. Theotecnus made no attempt to terrify him ; he took another course. To gain so strong a man was worth an effort. "Not one of these tortures shall touch you," he said, "if you will be wise and sacrifice. You shall have a free pardon for the crimes which you have committed. You shall be a special friend of mine, and enjoy the familiarity of the emperors themselves.

They shall write to you with their own hands, and you to them." He went on to offer the priesthood of Apollo, with all the influence and patronage which belonged to that dignified office, if only Theodotus would forswear "that Jesus, whom Pilate, once a judge like me," he said, "crucified in Judaea." The people in court ventured to applaud his speech, and to congratulate Theodotus on his good fortune.

The answer of Theodotus was not such as to invite further offers from the apostate. Amidst the hubbub which arose in the court, Theodotus was placed upon the rack; Theotecnus himself, it is said, left his chair and actually assisted in the torture. All the usual horrors were tried. At last, when blazing torches were held under him, the martyr smelt the burning of his own flesh, and turned his nostrils a little on one side. Theotecnus, on the watch for the least sign of weakness, was soon beside him. "If you had not blasphemed the gods," he said, "you would never have suffered thus. I should advise you—for you are only a shopkeeper—not to talk any more against the emperors, who have power to shed your blood." The martyr's reply was sufficient to make Theotecnus order the executioners to dash his teeth out, as Euphemia's were dashed out. Theodotus only answered, "If you should cut my tongue out, and all my organs of speech, God can hear a Christian who cannot speak."

He was remanded to prison. The governor thought that it would be beneficial to have him led thither, just as he was, fresh from the torture, through the market-place, that everybody might see what Christians had to expect. Theodotus said to the people who crowded round him, "It is fitting for

those who believe in Christ to offer to Him such sacrifices as I have offered ; for He first suffered thus on behalf of each of us." After five days in prison, fresh arguments and fresh tortures were applied to him. Theodotus was not insensible to the pain. "O Lord Jesus Christ, Hope of the hopeless," he cried aloud, "hear my prayer and assuage this agony, for it is for Thy holy name that I suffer it." He received grace to endure ; and at last Theotecnus wrote his sentence of release : "Theodotus, a patron of the Galilaeans, and an enemy of the gods, who will not obey the emperors, and treats me also with disrespect, is condemned by my authority to undergo the penalty of the sword, and his beheaded body to be burned with fire." He was executed, praying to God that the violence of the enemy might come to an end in him, and that peace might be restored to the Church.

The sequel of the story is not the least interesting part of it. The body of Theodotus lay unconsumed beneath a heap of wood and straw, under a guard of soldiers, when Fronto, the presbyter from the village on the Halys, appeared upon the spot, with an ass laden with old wine. It was evening, and the soldiers were preparing their supper, and in friendly terms invited the good old man to join them. He did so, and gave them some of his wine to drink. Their tongues were loose, and he soon found out what their business at that moment was. More and more of Fronto's wine went down their throats ; and when they fell into a drunken slumber, the wine skin which the ass bore was exchanged for the body of the martyr. Theodotus' ring was restored to his finger. "Come now, martyr," said the old



man, "fulfil the promise that you made me," and turning the ass's head towards home he drove her off to the spot which Theodotus had thought to be a good place for a martyr's body to be buried in.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ruinart, p. 295 ; Franchi de' Cavalieri in *Studi e Testi*, vi.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE FORTY OF SEBASTIA

How literally Christians were reduced to the position of outlaws by the first persecuting edict of Diocletian is shown by the story of Julitta, as told by the great St. Basil.

Julitta was a wealthy widow of Caesarea in Cappadocia, of which St. Basil was afterwards bishop. An unscrupulous fellow-citizen had possessed himself little by little of a great part of her property, and threatened to swallow up what was left. Julitta at length determined to bring a lawsuit against him. The day of the trial came; the suit was called by the herald; the widow's counsel began to open the case, and to point out the wrongs which she had suffered at the hands of the defendant. Suddenly the defendant interrupted the proceedings, and maintained that there was no case to come before the court. He pointed out that those who would not worship the gods and forswear Christ were not in a position to claim legal redress. The judge acknowledged that the plea thus advanced was true; he could do no otherwise. Incense was brought, with fire, and Julitta was asked whether she would qualify by offering it. Though taken aback by a turn which, in her ignorance, she had not expected, Julitta refused to save her worldly goods by casting away her soul. To every suggestion of a perhaps not unfriendly

magistrate she only replied that she was a servant of Christ. She was condemned to be burned, and went to the stake with alacrity, exhorting any Christian women who were near her to be as brave as the men. "Eve," she said—or St. Basil puts the words into her mouth—"was not only made flesh of Adam's flesh, but bone also of his bone." It was the courage of women like Julitta which in the end broke the forces of the persecuting Roman Empire, and of the powers of evil which wielded them; and St. Basil might well cry that the arch-enemy who began by boasting that all the world was his, and that "his hand would find as a nest the riches of the people and gather them like eggs that are left, so that not a wing should move,"<sup>1</sup> was reduced to impotence by a widow's steadfastness.<sup>2</sup>

There was no part of the empire where Christianity had gained a greater hold than in the province of Capadocia and the regions adjoining it. The independent kingdom of Armenia, close at hand, was already a Christian kingdom, under a Christian king; and the Armenian subjects of the Roman emperors were already beginning that vast succession of obscure martyrdoms, which, to the shame of Christian Europe, continues to this day. Partly, perhaps, in consequence of its Christianity, and partly for other reasons, that region was in a state of ferment and disturbance at the time when the persecution of Diocletian began; and the emperor thought it advisable to place the government of Capadocia and the border in the hands of two special commissioners, named Lysias and Agricola.

In levying recruits for the army, the agents of Lysias determined to press into the service a young

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah x. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Basil, *Hom.* v.

man named Hiero, who owned and cultivated a small farm near Tyana. Hiero was at work in the fields with a party of labourers, when he saw the recruiting party coming. Detesting the thought of military service, with all its dangers for a Christian, the rash man determined to resist. Drawing the handle out of a mattock, he laid it lustily about the intruders, until they thought it safer to retire. Then, with his men, he took refuge in a cave, and prepared for a siege. The case, however, was hopeless from the first; and the brother of Hiero, who came with a message from the chief magistrate of the neighbouring town, persuaded him to surrender before committing himself further.

Paying a farewell visit to his blind mother, Hiero set out for the town of Melitene, where Lysias was. There he suddenly found himself in prison with one and thirty others, all of whom were Christians. They made a compact together that none of them would sacrifice if called upon to do so. On his appearing before Lysias, however, next morning, the commissioner asked Hiero nothing of the kind, but only whether it was he who had resisted the recruiting agents. He confessed what he had done. The commissioner, wishing to make an example of him, ordered his hand to be cut off at the wrist. The others were whipped, and all were thrust into prison. One of the party, by bribing a dishonest warder, got his name erased from the indictment, and escaped in the night; but the rest remained for trial. Four days later, they, or a certain number of them, were examined by Lysias, and were condemned, after being beaten with rods, to have their heads cut off. A rich Christian negotiated with Lysias for the head of Hiero; and according to Hiero's own desire the hand which had been first severed, and which had been

preserved by Christian friends, was taken as his legacy to the blind mother.<sup>1</sup>

The position of head registry in the court of Lysias was held that year by a Christian veteran, who bore the Greek name of Eustratius, but was known to his Armenian friends by the native name of Cyrisices. His mind was tormented by the scenes which he was compelled to witness. It was his duty one day to cite into court a presbyter named Auxentius, who had already made a good confession before Lysias. As he did so, he declared his admiration for the presbyter, and avowed himself also to be a Christian, and a Christian from infancy. For seven and twenty years he had been in the service, and in the same department of the service, as a military secretary. His avowal soon brought him to torture by fire, but Eustratius uttered not a sound, and only smiled at the pain. "Would you like me to think of some other little pleasure for you?" asked the irritated magistrate. Eustratius welcomed the proposal. "Then bring some strong brine, mixed with vinegar," said Lysias; "scrape his burns with a bit of broken pottery, and pour plenty of the brine over the place, until he has had enough of these attentions." Eustratius bore it quietly. "It is theatrical ostentation," said Lysias, who was a learned man and perhaps knew the views of Marcus Aurelius about Christian martyrdom; "let him now tell us whether he will come to the altar and worship the gods." Eustratius was not minded to do so. "Perhaps," said Lysias, "your bodily exhaustion has affected your mind, and made you delirious. Put away your groundless hopes, and accept the salvation which I offer you." But Eustratius would have none of it.

His example was contagious. One of his under-

<sup>1</sup> Symeon Metaphrastes (Migne), vol. iii. p. 109.



lings, called Eugenius, now stood out and said with a loud voice, "I too am a Christian, and I curse your religion, and am determined to resist your wishes and the command of the emperors, as my superior Eustratius has done." "It is difficult to punish these people," exclaimed the commissioner. "It wants a great deal of time and leisure to examine them, and I have enough to do in looking after affairs of state. Put these two men in irons, along with the others whom I have to examine."

When darkness fell, the magistrate started on a night journey towards the city of Nicopolis. He gave orders that the Christian prisoners should follow his train. Nails were placed in their shoes, to make the march more painful. The second day they came to a place, Arauraca, which happened to be the native place both of Eustratius and of Eugenius; but although people flocked to gaze at the great man and at his afflicted followers, none of the kinsfolk or friends of Eustratius dared to come near him. One man of the district, however, named Mardarius, took the opportunity to proclaim himself a Christian, and to claim the honour of being added to the number of the prisoners. Auxentius the presbyter, who also belonged to Arauraca, was undergoing an examination at the moment. "Do not give me any more trouble, Auxentius," said Lysias; "pay yourself the compliment of thinking yourself worthy to be saved. Let us hear now whether you have given up this silly and dangerous obstinacy, and will enter into favour with the gods again." "I will tell you in very few words," answered the priest; "I swear to you by the justice above us which takes account of all things, that my mind is not to be changed. I know and worship one God and one only." Lysias condemned him to be

beheaded. "Now," he said, "bring the one who just attached himself to the others. We will soon give him the honour which he courts." While they were getting Mardarius ready, the man appealed to Eustratius: "Pray for me, Cyrisices; and tell me what to answer this wolf of a man. I am no scholar, and he will laugh at me." "Say nothing, brother," replied Eustratius, "except, 'I am a Christian;,' 'I am a servant of Christ.'" Mardarius did as he was told. To all questions his answer was the same. The "wolf" of a magistrate had him tied up head downwards, by a rope passed through the tendons of his heels, and hot irons put to him. After a time, Mardarius expired, with thanksgiving upon his lips, and Eugenius followed closely after him.

The troubles of Lysias were not yet over for the day. He went out into the field near the town to hold a review of the troops. He was particularly struck by the looks of a tall, handsome soldier called Orestes. He was paying the man a compliment, when accidentally it came out that Orestes was a Christian. His belt was immediately taken away, and he was expelled from the army and placed under arrest. When Nicopolis was reached, there was quite a Christian demonstration amongst the troops who were stationed there. The feeling was so strong that Lysias did not dare to try his Christian prisoners at Nicopolis, but despatched Eustratius and Orestes under escort to his brother-commissioner Agricola at Sebastia. There Orestes was soon done away with. Agricola seems to have made an attempt to save Eustratius from his fate by suggesting that he should make a pretence in public of worshipping the gods, and seek forgiveness from his own God afterwards. Eustratius naturally rejected the

base suggestion with contempt, and died like a good Christian in the fire. He was fortified, it is said, for his last conflict by receiving the Holy Communion in his prison from the hands of the good Bishop of Sebastia, St. Blaise, who had not yet suffered the martyrdom which he afterwards endured.<sup>1</sup>

It became a kind of fashion among the martyrs of that region to make a dying testament disposing of their property and of their relics, and the wills which Hiero put in the hands of Antonius, and Eustratius in those of St. Blaise, are among the most trustworthy parts of their history. The most elaborate testament of this kind was that of forty famous soldiers who died a year or two later at Sebastia while Agricola was still in office.

“Meletius and Aetius and Euty chius,” so runs this curious document, “the prisoners of Christ, to the holy bishops and priests, deacons and confessors, in every city, and to all others who belong to the Church, greeting in Christ.

“When we by the grace of God and the common prayers of all shall finish the strife that is set before us, and come to the rewards of the high calling, we desire that then this will of ours may be respected, to wit, that our relics be conveyed to our father the presbyter Proidus, and our brethren Crispin and Gordius, and the zealous laity who are with them, to Cyril and Mark and Sapricius the son of Ammonius, in order that our relics may be deposited near the city of Zela, at the spot called Sarin. For although we all come from different localities, we have chosen one and the same resting-place. Since we have set before ourselves one common strife for the prize, we have agreed to

<sup>1</sup> Symeon Metaphrastes (Migne), vol. iii. p. 468.

make also one common resting-place in the aforesaid spot. These things have seemed good to the Holy Ghost and have pleased us. Therefore we which are with Aetius and Eutychius and the rest of our brethren in Christ beseech our honoured parents and brethren to have no grief or distress, but to respect the decision of our brotherly fellowship, and to consent heartily to our wishes, in order that you may receive from our common Father the great recompense of obedience and of sharing in our sufferings. Moreover we intreat all men that no one will secure for himself any single fragment of our relics gathered out of the furnace, but to give them up to the persons aforesaid with a view to their being gathered together in the same place, in order that by such a proof of earnest determination and of disinterested goodwill he may receive the gain of a share in our sufferings themselves ; even as Mary, abiding steadfastly by the tomb of Christ, saw the Lord before the rest and was the first to obtain the grace of joy and blessing. If, on the other hand, any one shall go counter to our wish, let him have no part in the sacred gain, but incur the penalty of the entire disobedience, for depriving us of our right by his petty selfwill, by compelling us as far as lay in his power to be sundered from one another, when our holy Saviour by His special grace and providence has united us together in faith.

“And if the boy Eunoicus by the favour of the gracious God shall be brought to the same end of the strife, he has requested to have the same dwelling-place with us. But if he shall be preserved unhurt by the grace of God and should be further proved in the world, we charge him to look liberally to our chapel, and we beseech him to keep the commandments of Christ, that in the great day of resurrection he may

obtain part in our felicity, because while he was in the world he endured the same afflictions with us. For goodwill to a brother looks to the righteousness of God, but disregard for kith and kin tramples upon God's commandment ; for it is written, 'He that loveth unrighteousness hateth his own soul.'

"Therefore I beseech you, brother Crispin and brother Gordius, and I charge you, to keep aloof from all worldly luxury and error. For the glory of the world is deceitful and has no stay in it ; it blooms for a little while, and then fades away like the grass, coming to an end even before it begins. Desire rather to have recourse to the gracious God, who gives riches that never fail to those who flee to Him, and bestows the prize of eternal life upon those who believe in Him. This time is an excellent time for those who desire to be saved ; it fixes generously the date for repentance, and takes away pretence from the practice of life, allowing nothing to be put off to the future, because the change may come at any moment. If thou knowest this, look to that which is profitable, and show in thy conversation the sincerity of thy religion, that if thou art overtaken while so doing, thou mayest wipe out the handwriting of former sins, for He saith, 'Wherein I find thee, in that will I also judge thee.' Endeavour ye therefore to be found blameless in the commandments of Christ, that ye may escape the eternal fire that never sleepeth. For that the time is short, the divine voice hath long ago told us loudly. Therefore honour charity above all things, for charity alone satisfies all requirements, by the law of brotherly love obeying God. For through the brother that is seen God who is not seen is honoured ; and though the word speaks only of brothers in the natural sense, it



means all those who love Christ. For our holy Saviour and God said that those were brethren who, without being connected by birth, were bound together by uprightness in regard to the faith, fulfilling the will of our Father which is in heaven.

“We greet the honoured presbyter Philip, and Proclianus, and Diogenes, together with the holy church. We greet the honoured Proclianus at Phydela, and those that are his, with the holy church. We greet Maximus, with the church ; Magnus, with the church. We greet Domnus, with his ; Iles, our father, and Valens, with the church. I, Meletius, also greet my kinsmen, Lutanius, Crispus, and Gordius, with theirs ; Elpidius, with his ; Hyperechius, with his. We greet also those at Sarin, the presbyter, with his ; the deacons, with theirs ; Maximus, with his ; Hesychius, with his ; Cyriac, with his. We greet all those at Chaduthi by name. We greet also all those at Charisphona by name. I also, Aetius, greet my kinsfolk, Mark and Aquilina, and the presbyter Claudius, and my brothers, Mark, Trypho, Gordius, and Crispus, and my sisters, and my wife Domna, with my little child. I also, Eutychius, greet those at Ximara, my mother Julia, and my brothers, Cyril, Rufus, and Riglus, and Cyrilla, and my newly married wife Basilia, and the deacons Claudius, Rufinus, and Proclus. We greet also the servants of God, Sapricius the son of Ammonius, and Genesius, and Sosanna with theirs. So, honoured friends, we all greet you all, forty brethren and fellow-prisoners—Meletius, Aetius, Eutychius, Cyrion, Candidus, Angias, Gaius, Chudion, Heraclius, John, Theophilus, Sisinius, Smaragdus, Philoctemon, Gorgonius, Cyril, Severian, Theodulus, Nicallus, Flavius, Xanthius, Valerius, Hesychius, Domitian, Domnus, Helian, Leontius, otherwise called Theo-

ctistus, Eunoicus, Valens, Acacius, Alexander, Bicrati-  
us, also called Vivian, Priscus, Sacerdon, Ecdicius, Athana-  
sius, Lysimachus, Claudius, Iles, and Melito. We then,  
the forty prisoners of the Lord Jesus Christ, have sub-  
scribed with our hand by one of our number, Meletius,  
and have confirmed all that is above written, and it has  
pleased us all. We pray with our souls, and with the  
Divine Spirit, that we may all obtain the eternal good  
things of God and His kingdom, now and for ever and  
ever. Amen." <sup>1</sup>

The story of these forty, as it was known to St.  
Basil some seventy years later, told how, after many  
other sufferings and trials, the general in command in  
Cappadocia made them spend one cold winter's night,  
when a keen north wind was blowing, with little or no  
clothing, on the ice-bound pool round which the city  
of Sebastia was built. Not far off from the spot where  
they were posted was the public bath, with its comfort-  
able shelter and abundance of warm water. Towards  
morning one of the inseparable forty could bear it no  
longer. He crept to the cheerful warmth, but it was  
as much as his strength permitted. Upon reaching  
the baths he died. His place among the forty, how-  
ever, was not left empty. As soon as it was discovered  
that one out of the band was missing, another Christian  
volunteered for his crown, and won it. Death was at  
last hastened by the breaking of their legs. The mother  
of one of them, said to have been Melito, whose name  
stands last among the signatures to the will, was present,  
and seeing that her son's body, which still breathed, was  
not put on the cart which conveyed the others away,  
took it up in her own arms, and carried it to the heap  
in which his comrades were laid. Their wish to be

<sup>1</sup> Von Gebhardt, p. 166 ; Knopf, p. 107.

undivided was so far accomplished ; but it was not long before the popular craving for relics overcame the deference due to their request, and fragments of the bodies, though none knew to which of the forty they belonged, found their way to many churches far from the chosen Sarin.<sup>1</sup>

That "wolf" Lysias, under whom Hiero and Eustratius suffered in Cappadocia, is not improbably the same person as the Lysias who, in the neighbouring province of Cilicia, gave judgment upon Claudius, Asterius, and Neon, and upon two female fellow Christians of theirs.

"Lysias, the president of the province of Cilicia, sitting upon the judgment-seat in the city of Aegae, said, 'Let the Christians who have been delivered by the officials to the magistrates of this city be presented for my judgment.' The warder Euthalius said, 'According to your commandment, my lord, the magistrates of this city present the Christians whom they have been able to get hold of. They consist of three boys, brothers, and two women with a baby. One of them is now before your worship. What are your excellency's commands with regard to him?'"

There was no need to find out whether the young man was a Christian ; that was already ascertained by the magistrates of the city. "What is your name?" asked Lysias. "Claudius." "Do not throw away your young life by mad folly. Come this moment and sacrifice to the gods, according to the commandment of our lord the Augustus, and so escape the horrors prepared for you." "My God," replied Claudius, "does not require such sacrifices, but works of mercy and upright lives. But your gods are unclean devils, and that is

<sup>1</sup> Basil, *Hom.* xix. ; cp. von Gebhardt, p. 171.

why they are pleased with sacrifices of this kind, destroying for ever the souls of those who worship them. You will never persuade me to worship them." Lysias ordered him to be got ready for the rods. While this was being done, he told him that he had instructions from the emperors to offer rewards and promotions to Christians who consented to sacrifice. "Their rewards," answered the young man, "are temporal ; but to confess Christ is everlasting salvation." He was placed on the hobby-horse and flame applied to his feet. A bit of flesh from his foot was cut off and shown to him. Claudius only answered, "Fire and tortures cannot hurt those who fear God. It only helps them to everlasting salvation, because they suffer these things for Christ's sake." The hooked talons tore his sides. Other tortures followed in succession. They only made him assert more confidently that torture was the way to salvation, and at last he was sent to prison, and his brother Asterius was called in.

After the usual preliminaries Lysias ordered him to the hobby-horse, saying, "Torture his sides, and as you do so say to him, 'Even now obey and sacrifice.'" Asterius replied, "I am the brother of the one who answered you just now. He and I are of one mind, and make the same confession. Do what you can. You have my body in your power, but not my soul." Fresh tortures were tried. "Fool ! madman !" cried the poor tortured boy, "why do you torment me ? Do you give no heed to what the Lord will make you pay for this ?" After still further measures had been taken, "Blind," he cried, "blind altogether ! I only ask of you to leave no part of my body untortured."

The third boy, Neon, came into court. "My son," said Lysias, "come and sacrifice to the gods, and escape

torture." "If your gods have any power," answered the boy, "let them defend themselves from those who deny them, without wanting you to defend them. But if you are as bad as they are, I am much better than your gods and than you. I will not obey you. My God is the true God, who made heaven and earth." "Hit him about the neck," said the governor; "and as you do it say, 'Do not blaspheme the gods.'" "Is it blasphemy," asked the boy, "to tell the truth?" His feet were stretched upon the horse; hot coals were laid upon him; his back was lashed with thongs. "When it was done," say the Acts, "Neon said, 'What I know to be for my good and profitable for my soul, that I will do. I cannot change my mind.'"

Lysias withdrew to the magistrate's private apartment, and drew the curtain. Then he came out and read his sentence from the tablet: "Let the brothers Claudius, Asterius, Neon, who are Christians, who blaspheme the gods, and refuse to sacrifice, be crucified outside the gate, and let their bodies be left to be torn to pieces by the birds."

The two women remained to be dealt with. Domnina was the first to be presented. "You see, my good woman," said Lysias, "the tortures and the fire prepared for you. If you wish to escape them, come and sacrifice to the gods." "I do not wish," Domnina answered, "to fall into eternal fire and into everlasting torments; and therefore I worship God, and His Christ, who made heaven and earth and all things that are therein. Your gods are stone and wood, the work of men's hands." Lysias ordered her to be stripped naked, and laid out flat, and beaten all over. The very order was enough to kill her. "By your eminence," exclaimed the executioner, "Domnina has died already!"



"Throw her body into a deep place in the river," said Lysias.

Then came Theonilla. To her the same invitation was made, to which she replied in almost the same words as Domnina. "Slap her face," said the governor ; "throw her down on the ground ; tie her feet together, and torture her well." When this was done, Theonilla indignantly exclaimed, "Whether you think it good to torture a gentlewoman and a stranger like this, you know best. God sees what you do." Lysias ordered them to hang her up by the hair and to slap her in the face. "Is it not enough," Theonilla burst out, "that you have stripped me naked? I am not the only one that you have covered with shame, but your own mother and wife also through me, for all women are of the same nature." Lysias asked her whether she were wife or widow. "It is three and twenty years," answered Theonilla, "since I was left a widow. I have remained a widow for my God's sake, fasting and watching in prayers ever since I forsook the unclean idols and knew my God." The answer of Lysias to this pathetic speech was to bid the tormentors shave her head with a razor to see if anything would make her ashamed, to put a girdle of wild briers about her, to tie her to four stakes, and to beat her all over the body. The last device was to put burning charcoal under or over her, and to let her die of the fumes. But before the charcoal was brought, Theonilla, like Domnina, was mercifully released. "Sir," reported the warder and the executioner, "she is no longer alive." "Get a sack," said the governor, "and put her body in it ; tie it tight, and let it be thrown into the sea."<sup>1</sup>

What became of the little babe which was with these

<sup>1</sup> Ruinart, p. 233 ; Surius, August 23.

martyrs we are not told. But the fate of another innocent child has gained for him and for his mother—another Julitta—a wider celebrity than Theonilla's. Julitta, like Theonilla, was a stranger to the province of Cilicia in which she suffered. Her home was Iconium ; but when the persecution broke out there, she started, with two maid-servants and her little son of three years old, named Cyric or Cyriac, in search of a place where either the Christians were less molested or she herself would be less well known than at Iconium. Seleucia, to which she first went, was even more disturbed than the home which she had left, and she passed on to the great city of Tarsus, the birthplace of St. Paul and the capital of Cilicia.

There she soon found herself before the judgment-seat of the governor. She confessed herself a Christian without hesitation, and told the governor what Christians thought of the worship of idols. Her babe was in her arms. The governor bade his attendants to bring him the pretty child, and to lay Julitta down and flog her. They did so. The frightened child naturally struggled to get back to his mother. When the governor attempted to set him upon his knee, the little lad, who heard his mother saying again and again under the blows, "I am a Christian," literally resisted tooth and nail, and catching up his mother's cry, called out, "I am a Christian ; I am a Christian." As the child kicked in the governor's embrace, he seized the foot with his hand. The child fell over the edge of the tribunal and was killed on the spot. Julitta saw what happened, and cried out from her place of torture, "I thank Thee, O Lord, that Thou hast suffered my child to be perfected before me, and to receive the crown that fadeth not away." After this, various tortures were employed

upon her, and she was asked again to have pity upon herself and sacrifice ; but Julitta answered that she would not sacrifice to devils, that she worshipped Christ, the only begotten Son of God, and that she was hastening to be with her child again. Her head was at last cut off. Her little son has given his name to one of the most famous of French schools, and her own name is borne by at least one parish far away in Cornwall.<sup>1</sup>

Julian, a young martyr who suffered, like Claudius and his brothers, at Aegae in Cilicia, had a remarkable history. For a whole year he was dragged about from place to place in the train of the governor of the province—then a man called Marcian—and examined with tortures at frequent intervals. His steps were followed from city to city by his devoted mother Asclepiodora, who carried with her the linen and the spices with which she hoped to be allowed to swathe his body after death. One day Marcian said to him suddenly in the middle of an examination, “Julian, have you a mother?” Probably it was his intention to induce the mother to work upon her son’s feelings and make him abjure. Julian feared that his mother might be seized and tortured. It has often been maintained by Christian people that it is lawful to tell a lie in order to save another’s life. Julian boldly answered, “No.” After he had been removed from the court, Marcian inquired what the officials in attendance had to say upon the point. Some of the citizens who were present informed him that Julian’s mother was alive. The young man was recalled. “Why did you tell me a lie,” asked Marcian, “and say that you had no mother?” “It is lawful for me,” he answered, “to tell a lie on behalf of

<sup>1</sup> *Analecta Bollandiana*, i. p. 192 ; Ruinart, p. 419.

my own mother, who has borne such fatigues for me." Marcian said that the officials should arrange for her to be summoned. "My mother will come," said Julian, "and," he added, "she will not spare me." The end of the story, as told by St. Chrysostom, was that the judge, casting about for a mode of death which should cause horror by its novelty, ordered Julian to be tied up in a sack with a number of serpents and scorpions, and thrown into the sea. Eusebius tells us of another martyr of the same period, named Ulpian, who was drowned at Tyre wrapped up in a raw hide with a dog and an asp.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Analecta Bollandiana*, vol. xv. p. 73 ; *Acta Sanctorum*, March, vol. ii. p. 421.

## CHAPTER XIV

### TARACHUS, PROBUS, AND ANDRONICUS

THE province of Cilicia was the scene of the trials of three men, whose sufferings, and whose words in the course of suffering, are recorded for us with more fulness of detail than those of any other martyrs of the period. The president of the province at the time was Flavius Gaius Numerianus Maximus,—the last being the name by which he was usually called.

Tarachus, Probus, and Andronicus had first been brought before Maximus at the city of Pompeiopolis, but apparently he had not been able then to go into the case, and they were presented again to him at Tarsus by the centurion whose business it was. The following dialogue took place between Maximus and Tarachus:—

“What is your name? You shall answer first, as being the senior in rank and appearance and age.” “I am a Christian.” “Stop that impious language, and say what your name is.” “I am a Christian.” “Hit him on the mouth, and say to him, ‘Do not give crooked answers.’” “I tell you the name that I bear in my very self; but if you ask my name in general use, my parents gave me the name of Tarachus. In the army I was called Victor.” “What is your station in life?” “I am a soldier, of a Roman family, born at Claudiopolis in Isauria; but because I am a Christian, I determined lately to retire.” “You mean that you were not allowed to remain in the army; you were too



impious. Who gave you leave to retire?" "I begged Fulvio, the head centurion, to let me go, and he did so." "I see your hair is grey; I should be glad to do my best for you in the way of promotion, and to make you a friend of the emperors, if you will obey me and come near and sacrifice to the gods. The emperors themselves constantly do so on behalf of the whole world." "The emperors themselves are grievously mistaken; Satan has imposed upon them." "Strike him on both sides of his face for saying that the emperors are mistaken." "I said, and I say again, that they are but men, and they are deceived." "Drop your would-be sagacity, and sacrifice, I say, to the gods of your fathers." "I serve the God of my fathers, not with the blood of sacrifice, but with a pure heart. God has no need of such sacrifices as those." "I respect your time of life, and have compassion for your advancing years; therefore I advise you to put away all madness, and to pay honour to the emperors, and to show respect for me. Be led by me and reverence the law of our fathers." "I will not depart from the law of my fathers." "Come near then and sacrifice." "I cannot commit ungodliness; I said, I honour the law of my fathers." "Is there any other law besides this, bad man?" "Yes, there is one, which you transgress in worshipping stocks and stones, the devices of men." "Hit him across the neck, and say to him, 'Do not play the fool.'" "I shall never depart from this folly, which is my salvation." "I will cure you of this folly, and make a sensible man of you." "Do what you please; my body is in your power." "Have off his tunic, and take rods to him." "Now you have made me a more sensible man indeed; with your stripes you have strengthened me to trust yet more firmly in the

name of God and His Christ." "Unholy, thrice accursed man ! do you serve two gods ? You confess it yourself, and yet you deny the gods." "I serve the God who is God indeed." "And yet you said that Christ also is a God." "That is so. Christ is the Son of the living God, the hope of Christians, by whom we are saved even though we suffer." "Stop this idle talk, and come and sacrifice to the gods." "It is no idle talk, but the truth. I am now sixty years old, and I was always brought up to speak the truth and never to depart from it." Demetrius the centurion here joined in : "Spare yourself, man ; listen to what I say, and sacrifice." "Go away," answered Tarachus ; "keep your advice for yourself, minister of Satan." Maximus said, "Let this man be put in heavier irons and taken to prison. Bring the next in seniority."

Probus was presented. "Put away all foolish language," said Maximus, "and tell me what you are called." "My first and best name is a Christian ; my second, by which men call me, is Probus." "Of what station in life ?" "My father was a Thracian, but I was born at Sida in Pamphylia. I am a civilian, but a Christian." "Little good will you get from that name. Follow my advice, and sacrifice to the gods, that you may receive honour from the emperors, and be a friend of mine." "I do not want the honour of the emperors, nor am I anxious for your good offices. I had a considerable property, but I gave it up, to serve the living God through Christ." "Take off his cloak ; gird him up and put him at the stretch. Beat him with thongs of raw hide." The compassionate centurion Demetrius again spoke : "Spare yourself, man ; you see your blood running to the ground." "My body is at your disposal," answered Probus ; "but your

punishments to me are an anointing with sweet ointments." After a time, Maximus began again his attempts at persuasion. "Will you not have done with this madness now? do you persist in it, unhappy man?" "I am not mad. I am wiser than you; I do not serve devils." "Turn him over and beat him on the belly." "Lord, help Thy servant." "As you beat him, say, 'Christian man, where is your helper?'" "He has helped me, and He helps me still. I care so little for your punishments that I will not obey you." "Think of your body, unhappy wretch. All the floor is covered with the blood from it." "Let me tell you this: the more my body suffers for Christ's sake, the better it is for the health of my soul." "Put him in irons, and stretch him to the fourth hole. Let him have no attention paid to him. Bring the other to the middle of the judgment-seat."

Andronicus was placed there. "What is your name?" "I am a Christian. That is what you want to know. There; I have told you that I am a Christian." "Those before you got no benefit from that name. I ask you a short question; give me a short answer,—your name?" "If you ask the common name that I bear among men, I am called Andronicus." "What is your origin?" "I am of good birth. My parents occupy the highest position at Ephesus." "Get rid of all stupid fancies, and be willing to take my advice. I speak to you like a father. Those before you chose to play the fool, and they did themselves no good by it. But you, now, be loyal to the emperors, and sacrifice to the gods of our fathers, and you shall find the benefit of it." "You are right to call them the gods of your fathers. Your father is Satan. You are his children, and you are

devils like him. You do his works." "Your youth makes you rash. It will get you into worse trouble." "You may think me young in years, but in soul I am of full age for anything." "Stop that talkative tongue, and sacrifice to the gods, that you may be spared ill usage." "Do you think me so senseless as to do worse than those before me, out of whom you got nothing? I am readier than you are." "Take off his clothes; gird him, and hang him up." Demetrius the centurion spoke: "Before your body is marred, take my advice, my poor fellow." "It is better for my body to be marred than my soul. Do what you please." Maximus said, "Follow my advice and sacrifice; if I touch you I shall cripple you." "I never have sacrificed, not even as a child, and I will not sacrifice now,—certainly not to the devils to whom you compel me to do it." "Get to work upon him." An officer named Athanasius who was there said, "Obey the governor. I am old enough to be your father. I give you good counsel." "Go away. Give good advice to yourself, because at your years you are so void of understanding as to persuade me to worship stones and devils." Maximus said, "The punishments have not yet touched you, unhappy man, because I wish you to have compassion upon yourself, and stop this folly, which does you no good." "This folly of ours is necessary for those who have hopes in Christ. 'Wisdom' endures for a time and procures eternal death for those who have it." "Who taught you this folly?" "The word of salvation, by which we live and shall live; we have a God in heaven, who is our hope of resurrection." "Part with this folly of yours before I have you crippled with long tortures." "My body is at your mercy. You have the power: do what you please." "Slash

his shins as hard as you can." "Let God behold and judge you speedily ; I have done nothing wrong, and yet you punish me as if I were a murderer." "Do you call it nothing wrong to be irreligious to the gods and to the emperors, and to show contempt for my judgment-seat ?" "I am contending for religion—the religion of the true God." "You would be religious if you honoured the gods, who are the objects of the religion of the emperors." "That would be not religion, but irreligion, if I were to forsake the living God and worship stocks and stones." "Are the emperors irreligious, then, villain ?" "They are, in my opinion ; and if you also choose to use your reason, you know that it is irreligious to sacrifice to devils." "Turn the instruments the other way, and prick his sides." "I am at your mercy ; abuse my body as you will." "Bring salt, and scrape his sides with potsherds." "Your injuries have only strengthened my body." "I shall destroy you bit by bit." "I am not afraid of your threats. My conviction is stronger than anything that your malice can devise. I despise your punishments." "Put chains upon his neck and his feet, and keep him in prison."

From Tarsus the governor proceeded to Mampsista, or Mopsuestia, and the three prisoners, according to the common custom, were taken along with him. Tarachus was brought into court.

"Well, well, Tarachus," said Maximus, "I suppose that the reason why people honour old age is because of the greater wisdom in counsel that comes with it. Therefore give yourself good advice, and do not to-day persist in your former notions, but sacrifice to the gods and earn the praise of piety." "I am a Christian," answered Tarachus, "and I pray that you and



your emperors may earn the same praise, and may put away all hardness of heart and blindness, and be quickened by the true God to a higher and better grounded conviction." "Knock his mouth with stones, and say to him, 'Cease your folly.'" "If I were not of sound mind, I should be a fool as you are." "See, your teeth are all loosened; have pity on yourself, unhappy man." "Nothing that you can do hurts me, not if you were to cut off all my extremities. I stand steadfastly before you in Christ which strengtheneth me." "Follow my advice; you had better. Come and sacrifice." "If I knew that I had better do it, I should not suffer as I do." "Strike him on the mouth, and tell him to cry out." "When my teeth are dashed out and my jaws crushed, I cannot cry out." "Will you not even now comply, impious man? Come to the altars, and pour a drink-offering to the gods." "Though you have stopped my voice so that I cannot cry out, you cannot hinder the thoughts of my soul. You have made me bolder and firmer." "I will take down your firmness, ruffian." "I am at your disposal; whatever you devise, I shall be more than a match for you in the name of God who strengtheneth me." "Open his hands and put fire in them." "I am not afraid of your fire, which endures for a moment; but I am afraid lest, if I were to obey you, I should become a partaker of the eternal fire." "Look, your hands are consumed with the fire. Will you leave off your madness, senseless man, and sacrifice?" "You talk to me as if I had begged you not to use your arts of persuasion upon my body. I am proof against all that you are doing to me." "Tie his feet and hang him up aloft by them; then send up a thick smoke in his face." "I thought nothing of your fire; do you suppose that I shall be afraid of your smoke?"

"Consent to sacrifice, now that you are hung up."  
"You may sacrifice, sir ; you are accustomed to sacrificing—even to sacrificing men. But God forbid that I should do so." "Put strong vinegar mixed with salt up his nostrils." "Your vinegar is sweet, and your salt has lost its saltiness." "Mix mustard with the vinegar and pour it into his nostrils." "Your officers are deceiving you, Maximus ; they gave me honey instead of vinegar." "I will think of some punishments for you next court day, and will put an end to your folly." "And I shall be the readier for your devices." "Take him down ; put him in chains and give him over to the gaoler. Call the next."

"Tell me, Probus," said the governor, when he appeared, "have you determined to be rid of the torments, or have you not yet put away your folly ? Come near and sacrifice to the gods, as the emperors do for the common salvation of mankind." "I am readier than you even to-day, and the former examinations and pains have given me vigour. Try me therefore with all the punishments that you can think of to promise ; for neither you, nor your emperors, nor your father Satan will ever persuade me to be so impious as to worship gods whom I do not know. My God is the living God in heaven. I worship and serve Him." "Are not these gods living gods, execrable man ?" "How can they be living gods, when they consist in stocks and stones, the works of men's hands ? Great ignorance makes you go wrong, sir, in doing service to them." "Do you think that I am wrong in admonishing you, abominable creature, and in doing service to the gods ?" "'Let the gods that have not made the heavens and the earth perish,' and all who worship them. For 'he that sacrificeth to other gods shall be

utterly destroyed.' We ought to offer to the Lord of heaven and earth, not with blood, but with praise in a pure heart, with truth and knowledge of Himself." "Make an end of these pernicious subtleties of yours, and sacrifice to the gods, Probus, and be saved." "I cannot serve many gods. The God whom I know to be God indeed, Him I serve and worship devoutly." "I will not ask you to worship many gods, as you say; come to the altar of Zeus and offer." "I have a God in heaven, and Him I fear. I do not serve those whom you call gods." "I said before, and I will say it again, sacrifice to the great god, the invincible Zeus, who watches over us." "Him whom all the poets describe as the husband of his own sister, an adulterer and corrupter of the young, a fornicator and profane, not to speak of the other disgraceful and unmentionable things attributed to him—O unrighteous and unholy man, do you bid me worship him?" "Hit him in the mouth and say to him, 'You must not blaspheme.'" "Why do you strike me? I told you that it was his worshippers who say these things about him. That is no lie, but the truth, as you very well know." "I am only nursing your folly by not putting you to pain. Make some irons red hot and set him to stand on them." "Your fire is cold; it does not burn me." "Make them as hot as possible and put him on them, holding him fast on each side." "Your fire has got cold; your ministers are mocking you." "Tie him tight, and stretch him out, and lay his back open with raw thongs, saying to him, 'Sacrifice, and do not be a fool.'" "I was not afraid of your fire, and I do not care for your tortures. If you have any other engine of torture, use it, that I may show the God who is in me." "Shave his head, and pile burning coals upon it." "You have

burned my feet and my head, and have proved that I am a servant of God and can bear your threats." "If you were a servant of the gods, you would have sacrificed to them like a religious man." "I am a servant of God, not of gods who destroy those who fear them." "Are not all those worshippers of theirs, who stand near this judgment-seat, honoured by the gods and the emperors, while they look upon you being punished for speaking ill of the gods?" "Believe me, they are all lost unless they repent of what they have thoughtlessly done, and unless they become servants of the living God." "Smite his face, and make him say 'gods,' not 'God.'" "Do you command my mouth to be struck for saying the truth, you lawbreaker?" "I shall not only command your mouth to be struck, but your blaspheming tongue to be cut out, that you may cease your fool's language and come and sacrifice." "If you choose to cut out the organ of speech, I have within me the immortal tongue with which to answer you." "Let this one also be taken for the present into the prison. Call Andronicus to the bar."

Andronicus had not seen or heard how his fellow-sufferers had answered. "Those who were examined before you," said Maximus, "endured great punishments, and it did them no good, my poor fellow; not till after all that ill-usage, and hardly then, were they persuaded to reverence the gods. Now they are to receive great honours from the emperors. Make up your mind before the tortures. Get yourself off the punishments, and by sacrificing to the gods show yourself a religious man and a good subject of the Augusti, that you too may receive suitable honours from them. If you will not, I swear to you by the gods and by the invincible emperors, the punishments

that I shall inflict on you for disobedience will be no simple matter." "Do not tell me," answered Andronicus, "that those who confessed before me were guilty of such feebleness ; and do not imagine that you can cheat me into yielding to crafty words. They never denied the law of our fathers, or consented to forsake their hopes in our God and join in your madness ; nor will I so far fall behind them in faith and endurance towards our Lord and God and Saviour. I do not know your gods, and I fear neither you nor your tribunal. Fulfil your threats. Apply your punishments. Get your instruments of torture in order. Use every endeavour against God's servant. Force me." "Stretch him upon the stakes, and flog him with raw thongs." "You have not done much to me ; you promised me something great, and swore by the gods and by those emperors whom you consider to be gods. Are these your threats?" Athanasius, who had before endeavoured to persuade him, said, "Your whole body is one wound, my poor fellow, and do you think that nothing?" "Those who love a living God," replied Andronicus, "do not care for these things." Maximus said, "Sprinkle salt upon his back." "You must have more salt than that sprinkled," retorted the sufferer, "if I am to keep, and to be able to withstand your cruelty." "Turn him over, and beat him on the belly, that his first stripes may be torn open again and may get down to his marrow." "I was wounded with your first tortures, and yet all my body is sound, as you saw when I stood at your bar just now. He who attended me then will heal me again." "Did I not give orders, rascally soldiers, that they were to receive no attention from any one, but to remain uncared for, so that they might be reduced



by their wounds and so comply?" One of the turnkeys answered, "By your greatness, no one took any care of them, nor has any one been in to see them. They were kept in chains in the inmost ward." "How then do their wounds not make more show?" "I do not know how they healed up, by your excellence." "Foolish man," said Andronicus, "our Saviour and Physician is great, and He heals those who are true to God without applying remedies. He heals those who hope in Him by His word. He dwells in heaven, but He is with us wherever we are. You do not know Him; you have no understanding." "Those foolish speeches will do you no good; but come and sacrifice to the gods, or I shall do away with you in a horrible manner." "Once and again I have told you the selfsame thing. I am not a child, to be coaxed and deceived with words." "You shall not get the victory over me, or despise me and my judgment-seat." "Neither will we be conquered by your threats, whether in words or in tortures. You shall find us true champions of God, who enables us through Christ our Saviour. Perhaps even you, sir, begin partly to see that we shall not be afraid of you and of your ill-usage." "Let a variety of instruments of torture be prepared for me against his next examination, and let this man be secured in irons and taken back to prison. Let no one see them in their confinement."

The third examination took place at Anazarbus.

"Has the respite from scourging made you willing at last to give up your impudent profession, Tarachus? Come and sacrifice to the gods, by whom the universe stands." "God forbid that the world should be governed by those beings for whom is prepared the

fire and the everlasting punishment, and not for them only, but for all you who do their will." "Will you stop your blasphemy, criminal? Do you think that such effrontery will gain you your end, by making me cut your head off and set you free?" "If I were to die quickly, that would be no great trial. Now do what more you please, that the reward of my conflict in the Lord may be increased." "You have suffered no more than other classes of prisoners who are tortured by the law." "That is another proof of your want of understanding and of your gross blindness. You do not see that the workers of wickedness deserve to be punished thus, while those who suffer for Christ's sake obtain a recompense from Him." "Detestable criminal, what recompense do you expect after a horrible death?" "You have no right so much as to ask about it, or to be told what reward is in store for us. That is why we submit to your insane threats." "Wretch, do you speak to me as if you were my equal?" "I am not your equal, and I pray that I never may be; but I have liberty to speak, and no man can stop me, through God which strengtheneth me by Christ." "I will *cut* that liberty out, you ruffian." "No one can take away my liberty—neither you, nor your emperors, nor your father Satan, nor the devils whom you are so misguided as to serve." "The very fact that I talk with you confirms you in your frenzy, impious wretch." "You have only yourself to blame. My God whom I serve knows that I abhor the very sight of you, and much less do I wish to converse with you." "Now, consider what it would be to have no more tortures, and come and sacrifice." "Both in my first confession at Tarsus, and in my second examination at Mampsista likewise, I confessed that I was a Christian, and I am the same

person here. Believe me, that is the truth." "When once I have killed you with tortures, what will you gain by repenting, unhappy man?" "If I had meant to repent, I should have been afraid of your first blows, and of your second, and should have done what you wished. Now I am established, and in the Lord I do not care for you. Do what you please, shameless man." "I have made you more shameless by not punishing you." "I told you before, and I say it again: you have my body in your power; do what you please." "Bind him and hang him up, that he may not be a fool." "If I were a fool, like you, I should join in your impieties." "Now that you are hung up, do what I tell you, before you undergo the pains you deserve." "Although, to begin with, you have no right over my person, to torture in this way an old soldier, which is illegal, still I make no objection to your madness. Do what you please." "A soldier honours the gods and the Augusti, and receives gifts and promotions for his piety; but you were impious, and were dismissed from the army in disgrace. I shall order you to be worse tortured for it." "Do what you please. I have asked you to do so again and again. Why do you put it off?" "Do not flatter yourself, as I said before, that I am disposed to put you quickly out of existence. I shall execute you inch by inch, and give your remains to the beasts." "What you do, do at once. Do not promise without performing." "Criminal, you think that after death your body will be tended by silly women and anointed with sweet ointments; but I shall take care, with regard to that, that your remains shall be destroyed." "I'll use my body now, and when you have killed me, do what you please with it." "Come near, I say, and sacrifice to the gods." "I told you

once for all, but it makes no impression on you, that I will neither sacrifice to your gods nor worship your abominations." "Take hold of his cheeks and rip them up." "You have disfigured and marred my face, but you refresh my soul the more." "Wretched man, you compel me to behave very uncomfortably towards you." "Do not think to terrify me with words. I am ready for you at every point. I wear the armour of God." "Thrice accursed creature, what armour do you wear?—tell me. You are naked, and all over wounds." "You do not know these things. You cannot see my panoply. You are blind." "I am patient with your madness. For all your exasperating answers I shall not dismiss you summarily from your body." "What harm have I spoken? You cannot, I repeat, see me and what I have on, not being pure in heart, but irreligious and an enemy to the servants of God." "I understand that you have long lived a bad life, and, as some tell me, you are a sorcerer as you stand here at the bar." "I never was so, nor am now, for I do not serve devils as you do, but God, who gives me endurance and suggests to me the word that I shall speak to you." "Those words will do you no good. Sacrifice, that you may have an end of ill-treatment." "Do you take me for a witless fool, not to listen to God and live for ever, but to you who would do my body good for a season and destroy my soul for ever and ever?" "Make some spits red-hot and run them into his breasts." "You may do more than that, and yet never induce God's servant to yield and to worship the figures of devils." "Bring a razor and take his ears off. Shave his head and put red-hot coals about it." "You have taken away my ears, but the ears of my heart are as sound as ever." "Take the skin off

his cursed head with the razor and cover it with red-hot coals." "If you were to order all my body to be flayed, I will not leave my God, who strengthens me to endure your weapons of wickedness." "Take those hot irons and put them under his armpits." "May God behold and judge you to-day." "What God do you call upon, accursed wretch?—tell me." "One whom you know not, though He is near us, who will render to each according to his works." "I am not going to kill you outright, so that, as I said before, they may wrap your remains in linen and whimper over them and worship them; but I give you a dreadful death, and order you to be burned, and I shall scatter abroad the ashes of your body." "I told you before, and I say again, do what you please. You have received power in this world." "Let him be taken back to prison and kept for the next wild beast fight. Bring the second.

"Have you reflected and taken counsel with yourself, Probus, that you may not fall into the same pains which you yourself endured some time ago, and which the last unfortunate wretch has endured? I think you have, and am persuaded that like a sensible man you have changed your mind and are prepared to sacrifice, that you may be honoured by us, having proved yourself devout towards the gods. Come near and do it." "We have but one way of thinking, sir, for we serve God, both of us. Do not imagine that you will hear anything from me but what you have already heard and learned. It will be of no use to flatter, nor will you persuade me by threatening, nor unman my courage by your idle talk. I stand before you to-day a bolder man than before, and I despise your fury. What are you waiting for, foolish man? Why do you



not make bare your madness?" "You have agreed together now to be impious and to deny the gods." "You have spoken the truth ; for once you have not lied, though as a rule you lie. We have conspired together in religion, and in regard to our conflict and confession ; therefore we withstand your malice in the Lord." "Before you meet worse treatment at my hands, reflect, and make an end of this folly of yours. Pity yourself. Be willing to take my paternal advice, and pay reverence to the gods." "I see that you will believe nothing at all, sir ; but believe me when I swear to you by my good confession towards God, that neither you, nor the devils that you are misguided enough to worship, nor your father Satan, nor those who have given you power against us, shall be able to overthrow our faith and affection towards God." "Bind him and gird him, and then hang him up by the toes." "Will you not cease your iniquity, wicked tyrant, contending on behalf of the devils which you resemble?" "Be guided by me before you suffer. Spare your own body. You see what pains are before you." "All that you do to me is profitable to my soul ; therefore, do what you please." "Heat the spits and put them to his sides, that he may not be a fool." "The more fool you think me, the wiser I am to God." "Heat the spits once more, and burn well into his back." "My body is at your disposal. Let God behold from heaven my shame and my endurance, and judge between me and you." "Wretched man, the very God whom you invoke has given you over to suffer these things, as your choice deserves." "My God is a lover of men, and wishes no harm to any man ; but every man knows what is best for himself, and has his free will and is master of his own mind." "Pour some wine off the altars upon

him, and put some flesh in his mouth." "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, behold this violence from Thy holy height and give sentence with me." "You have endured a great deal, unhappy man, and yet see, you have tasted of the altar. What can you do now?" "It was no great stroke of business to pour over me by violence, as best you could, against my will, of your unclean sacrifices. God knows my will." "You both ate and drank, idiot. Promise to do it for yourself, and you shall be taken down out of your bonds." "I defy you, lawbreaker, to overcome my confession. Let me tell you that if you were to pour upon me of all your unclean meats at once you will do me no harm, for God in heaven sees the violence done to me." "Heat the spits and burn the lower part of his legs right through." "Neither your fire, nor your tortures, nor (as I have told you many times) your father Satan shall induce God's servant to abandon the confession of the true God." "There is no part of your body still sound, unhappy wretch, and do you not yet understand?" "I gave my body over to you for this purpose, that my soul might remain sound and unspotted." "Heat some sharp nails and pierce his hands with them." "Glory to Thee, O Lord Jesu Christ, that Thou hast vouchsafed even to allow my hands to be nailed for Thy name's sake." "So many tortures are beginning to make you still more foolish, Probus." "So much power, Maximus, and your malice, which is without measure, have made you not only foolish but blind, for you know not what you do." "Villain, how dare you call one who contends for piety towards the gods foolish and blind?" "I wish that you were blind in your eyes, and not blind in heart; now you think that you see, while you are gazing in darkness."

"With your whole body disabled, do you accuse me, miserable creature, because I have left your eyes still uninjured?" "Even if your cruelty should tear my eyes out of my body, the eyes of my heart cannot be blinded by men." "I shall cut out your eyes, foolish man, and punish you in that way also." "Do not promise without performing. You cannot terrify the servant of God. If you do it indeed, you cannot injure my invisible eye." "Put his eyes out, that though he has a little while to live he may have no light." "There; you have taken away my bodily eyes, but I defy you, cruel tyrant, to deprive me of my living eye." "Can you talk like that in the dark, wretch?" "If you knew the darkness that is in you, you would call me blessed, ungodly man." "Your whole body is dead, and will you not leave off this idle talk, wretched creature?" "As long as my breath remains in me, I will not cease to speak by God's help, who strengthens me in Christ." "After all these tortures, do you expect still to live? I assure you that I shall not leave you to die for yourself." "This is why I strive to contend with you, accursed man, that my good confession may be made perfect, and that I may die at your hands in whatever manner it may be, merciless hater of men." "I shall destroy inch by inch, as you deserve." "You have the power, proud underling of tyrants." "Take him away and load him with irons, and keep him in the prison. Let none of their tribe have access to them, to congratulate them on what they have gone through at my hands for their impiety. After the session he shall certainly be given to the wild beasts. Call that ruffian Andronicus.

"Andronicus, have you at last had pity upon your youth, and taken wise counsel with yourself to reverence

the gods, or are you still in the same mad mind, which can do you no good? If you will not listen to me, and sacrifice to the gods, and pay due honour to the emperors, you will get no comfort nor pity from me; so come near and sacrifice and be saved." "No blessing come to you, you enemy and alien to all truth! tyrant, with less remorse than any wild beast! I have borne all your threats, and now do you think to persuade me by what in your wickedness you illegally command to be done to punish the servants of God? No, you shall not undo my confession towards God. I stand here to defy your savage devices in the Lord, and will show you that the resolution of my soul is young and strong." "I believe that you are mad and have a devil." "If I had a devil, I should obey you; not having one, I will not obey. You are a devil and nothing else, and you do the deeds of devils." "The men who preceded you said what they pleased, as you do, till they were tortured. Afterwards they were persuaded by the severity of the inflictions to reverence the gods, and came to be loyal to the Augusti, and poured drink-offerings to them, and are saved." "It is all in keeping with your evil belief to lie; for the beings whom you are misguided enough to serve did not abide in the truth. You are a liar, like your father. Therefore God shall speedily judge you, minister of Satan and of all the devils." "Let Him do so, if I do not treat you as the impious wretch that you are, and bring down your stubbornness." "I shall fear neither you nor your threats in the name of my God." "Bring fire, and tie small wisps of burning stuff and hold them to his belly." "If you could burn me all up and yet keep me alive,

you should not prevail against me, accursed tyrant. The God whom I serve is with me and strengthens me." "How long will you be such a fool as to refuse? Do you not wish at least to die for yourself?" "As long as I live, I shall prevail against your malice. I am eager to be wholly destroyed by you. That is my boast in God." "Drive in the red-hot spits between his fingers." "Senseless man, the enemy of God, full of all devices of Satan, when you see my body consumed with your tortures, do you still think that I am afraid of your devices? I have within me the God whom I serve through Jesus Christ. I despise you." "Fool, do you not know that He whom you are calling upon was a man who, under the authority of a governor named Pilate, was fastened to the cross for His crimes? Records of it are preserved." "Be silent, accursed man! You are not allowed to say such things. You are not worthy to speak of Him, impious creature! If you were so blessed as to be worthy, you would not practise these impieties upon the servants of God. But now, being alienated from the hope that is in Him, you have not only lost yourself, but are endeavouring to force those who are His. Transgressor!" "What good will you get, desperate wretch, by faith and hope in that criminal Christ of whom you speak?" "I have already got good, and shall get more; it is by that means that I bear all this." "I do not mean to use instruments of torture to do away with you quickly. You shall be given to the beasts, and shall see your members devoured one after another before you are rid of life." "Why, are you not more savage than any beast, and more ruthless than any murderer, because you have punished men who



have done no wrong, and are not even accused of doing wrong, as if they were murderers? I serve my God in Christ, then; I do not ask to be excused your threats. Bring the most formidable instrument of torture that you can think of. You shall find that I have courage." "Open his mouth first, and put flesh from the altars in it; and pour wine into it." "O Lord my God, behold the violence done to me!" "What will you do now, miserable creature? You would not reverence them nor sacrifice to them, and now you have tasted of their altars." "O blind and senseless fool of a tyrant, you poured it down my throat by main force. God knows; He understands the thoughts, and He is able also to deliver me from the wrath of Satan and his ministers." "How long will you play the stupid fool, and utter this nonsense which brings you no benefit?" "I expect to reap the benefit from God, and that is why I endure all this; but you do not understand what I look for, that makes me steadfast." "How long will you be a fool? I will crop your tongue, and stop your nonsense that way. You show me that I am to blame, because my forbearance has made you more of a fool than you were." "I entreat you to do it: cut away the lips and tongue on which you flatter yourself that you laid your pollutions." "Fool, after all your obstinacy under punishment, see—as I said, you have tasted those meats." "Woe be to you, execrable tyrant, and woe be to those who have given you this power, for defiling me with those abominable sacrifices. But you shall see what you have done against the servant of God." "Do you dare to speak despitefully of the emperors, villain,—the emperors who have given so profound a peace

to the world?" "I did and I will speak despitefully of them, plagues and bloodbibbers that they are, who have turned the world upside down; and may God, with His immortal hand, not being long suffering with them, requite them with such a chastisement that they may know what they are doing to His servants." "Put an iron into his mouth and dash out his teeth, and take out his impudent, blaspheming tongue, that he may learn not to blaspheme against the Augusti; and burn the villain's tongue and teeth to ashes and sprinkle them about, every fragment, that no foolish women belonging to his impious religion may keep an eye upon them, and get hold of them, and preserve them as precious and sacred things. And take the man himself, and consign him to the prison and keep him, that in company with his impious associates he may be given to the beasts to-morrow."

The Christians of Anazarbus, or of Tarsus, paid two hundred denarii to one of the agents of the governor's court to make a transcript of the official *Acta*, or record, of this trial, and sent it to the brethren at Iconium, and here it now is. As we read it, we seem to be standing in the court, and watching and listening to the magistrate and the martyrs. It is indeed like a duel between them,—the judge determined not to kill them if he can help it, but to make them obey orders; they, even more determined to endure. It is not to be wondered at that, in the heat of such a conflict, words were sometimes wrung from the lips of the sufferers which were hardly in accordance with Christian meekness. The voice of indignant protest was no less needed at the time than that of resignation and submission;

and it was well that in an age of heartless tyranny presidents and proconsuls, and emperors themselves, should be told plainly what the human conscience felt under such oppression, even if the utterance occasionally hardened the magistrate's heart instead of softening it, and stung him to further cruelties.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ruinart, p. 375.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE MARTYRS OF PALESTINE

SOME brave confessions took place in Syria, as elsewhere. Cyril, the Bishop of Antioch, was sent into exile, to work in the mines of Pannonia. But most of the martyrdoms at Antioch appear to have been those of strangers to the city. There Tyrannio, the Bishop of Tyre, was thrown into the sea. There Zenobius, a priest and physician of Sidon, perished under torture. The Christians of Antioch themselves were more terrified than inspired by these examples. Christian men, accompanied by their wives and children, went together in crowds to sacrifice to the idols. A deacon and exorcist of Caesarea in Palestine, whose name was Romanus, had left his home for Antioch at the time when the churches were destroyed. He saw one of these groups of unhappy apostates approaching the heathen altars, and his spirit was grieved beyond endurance. With a loud voice he called upon them to desist from their sin, and to return to their Christian allegiance. Naturally, he was at once arrested. The local magistrate, who was presiding at the interrupted sacrifices, ordered him to be burned. He was tied to the stake, and the faggots were heaped about him. But the emperor Galerius was himself in Antioch at the moment. The magistrate thought it necessary to report to him what was taking place. Romanus grew impatient at the delay, and asked repeatedly, "Where

is my fire? where is my fire?" But his end was not to come so speedily. Galerius sent for him, and commuted his sentence for a more cruel one. He ordered the deacon's tongue, which had dissuaded others from the service of the gods, to be cut out by the roots. Romanus willingly gave every facility for the horrible operation. According to some accounts, which there is no reason to disbelieve, the brave man could still make himself understood when his tongue was gone, and during an imprisonment of many months used his remaining powers of speech to confirm his fellow Christians in their faith. When the festival of Diocletian's twentieth year of sovereignty was kept, and the other inmates of the prison at Antioch were set at liberty, Romanus was alone detained, with his feet day and night stretched in the stocks to the fifth hole. At length they gave him his liberty in the form which he most desired. A noose was thrown round his neck, and he passed by death to the presence of his Lord.<sup>1</sup>

There were some at Antioch, of whom Eusebius speaks, who, rather than touch the heathen sacrifices, were willing to hold their right hands in the fire till they were consumed. Some, less nobly, sought refuge in suicide, and threw themselves headlong from the tops of their houses. One distinguished lady, who had two beautiful and devout daughters, contrived to send them out of the country, thinking that they might be safer abroad. The authorities discovered where they were, and fetched them back to Antioch. Attended by an escort of soldiers, the two girls and their mother were on their way to the court of law, where they had reason to fear that worse things than

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *De Mart. Palaest.* 2.



martyrdom awaited them. They had taken counsel together, and their resolution was formed. The road lay along the bank of the river Orontes. They begged their attendants to loose their hold of them for a moment, and, gathering their garments round them, the three plunged into the river and were drowned. Another pair of sisters at Antioch were thrown into the sea by their persecutors.<sup>1</sup>

The conflicts of the martyrs of Palestine were recorded by the hand of the historian Eusebius, himself a presbyter of the chief city of Palestine, Caesarea, and afterwards its bishop.

The first whose martyrdom he records was a man of the name of Procopius. Procopius was a native of Jerusalem, and lived at Scythopolis, the Bethshan of the Bible, where he held the offices of reader and exorcist. His life from early youth had been that of an ascetic. Bread and water were his only food, and of these at times he partook only on alternate days. He was often known to go without food for a week together. Day and night he was occupied in the study of the Scriptures, and in translating Greek books of edification into the Aramaic of his country. Along with other Christian confessors he was brought, at the very outset of the persecution, to Caesarea. Immediately upon his arrival at the gate of that city, without having even visited the prison, he was brought before the governor, who required him to sacrifice to the gods. "There is but one God, the Almighty," Procopius answered. The governor refused to argue the question, and begged Procopius, if he would not acknowledge the gods, to burn incense to the emperors, of whom there were four. Procopius burst out laughing, and

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* viii. 12.

replied with a quotation from the *Iliad*, where Homer says—

“It is not good to have lords many ;  
Let One be Lord, One King.”

The governor did not understand, perhaps, the spiritual meaning which the Christian put upon these verses ; in any case he considered the language treasonable, and condemned Procopius to be beheaded.<sup>1</sup>

Many of the leading Christians of the neighbouring churches were soon called upon to follow the example of Procopius. Some, Eusebius says, failed from the first. Others passed from torture to torture, were scourged, were racked, had their sides crimped, were loaded with heavy irons, so that some of them lost the use of their hands. In many cases the officials were satisfied with an unreal appearance of success. One man was dragged to the altar, both his hands held fast by attendants on either side ; some of the sacrificial meat was placed by force in his right hand, and he was dismissed. Another never even touched the sacrifice, but the bystanders shouted that he had sacrificed, and he went free. Another was brought from prison in a fainting condition, and thrown on one side for dead : his chains were taken off, and he was reckoned as having sacrificed. Others again, who vehemently protested that they had neither sacrificed nor intended to do so, were struck on the mouth, and their cries were drowned by the shouts around them, and they were hustled out of court.

Out of all this number two only were put to death. Their names were Alphaeus and Zacchaeus. The latter, who was a deacon at Gadara, was so called by his friends

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *De Mart. Palaest.* 1. Cp. *Texte und Untersuchungen*, vol. xiv., part 4, p. 3.

because, like the publican of Jericho, he was little of stature, and because he was so earnestly desirous to see the Lord. He joyfully bore his testimony before the magistrate under torture, and was thrown for a night into the stocks. Alphaeus, who was a reader and exorcist at Caesarea itself, set himself strenuously to persuade his feeble brethren not to comply with the command to sacrifice. His unconcealed activity in this behalf soon brought him before the magistrate. There he delivered his beliefs with eloquence and freedom, was tortured, and cast into the stocks like Zacchaeus. After three days the two men were again brought into court. The magistrate bade them sacrifice to the emperors; but they answered, "We know but one King, the King of all." Their offence was like that of Procopius, and it was visited with a similar penalty. The two men were beheaded together, some five months after the death of Procopius.<sup>1</sup>

In the following year, which was the second year of the persecution, the difficulties of the Christians in Palestine were increased. A more severe governor, named Urban, took the place of Flavian, under whom Alphaeus and Zacchaeus had suffered, and two fresh and more formidable edicts came from headquarters, of which the second prescribed that all the inhabitants of every city, man, woman, and child, should be compelled to join in a common sacrifice.

The town of Gaza had the reputation of being a bigotedly heathen town. One Christian inhabitant of Gaza, who bore the name of Timothy, had long endured ill-treatment from his fellow-citizens on account of his religion. When the edict was put in execution at Gaza,

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *De Mart. Palaest.* i. Cp. *Texte und Unt.* (as above), p. 7.

Timothy naturally found his way to prison. After a brave confession before Urban, and the usual tortures, he was condemned to die by fire, but Urban expressly ordered that the fire should be a slow one,—no doubt in order to give him the opportunity of changing his mind. So, like gold in the furnace, as the historian says, the faith of Timothy was proved true.

Two other Christians, a man named Agapius and a woman named Thecla, who were Phrygians by birth, had been seized at Gaza at the same time with Timothy, but another fate was assigned to them. A great festival was approaching, and Urban determined to add a special interest to the celebration of it by announcing that, besides horse-races in the circus at Caesarea, a gala performance in the theatre, and other interesting spectacles, these two Christians, along with some others who came from Phrygia, would fight with wild beasts. The sensation throughout Palestine was immense, for such exhibitions had not been common in the country. On the day appointed, six stalwart young men tied one another's hands fast behind their backs, and running up at full speed, just as Urban set foot on the stairs of the amphitheatre, loudly proclaimed that they were Christians, and offered to show that they were not afraid of wild beasts. One of the six, Timolaus, was a native of the distant province of Pontus ; another, Dionysius, came from Tripoli in Phoenicia ; Romulus, the third, was a subdeacon of Diospolis ; two were Egyptians, named Paësis and Alexander ; and the sixth, another Alexander, belonged to Gaza. As soon as the governor and his attendants recovered from the first shock of surprise, the six were sent to prison. There they were visited by the compassionate brother of the last-named Alexander, a second Agapius of Gaza, who

had already several times borne gallant testimony to his faith, and by another Christian named Dionysius, who ministered to their necessities. So assiduous were these two in their attentions to the prisoners, that Urban ordered their arrest ; and after a few days all the eight were brought out together, condemned, and beheaded.<sup>1</sup>

It seems that Eusebius intends us to understand that the woman Thecla perished by the wild beasts to which she was exposed ; but her companion, Agapius, survived for many a tedious day. For two years and a half he lay in his prison at Caesarea. Thrice at least during that long time he was led out with malefactors to execution ; but on each occasion the governor, either in pity, or in the hope of persuading him to abjure Christ, only threatened him and sent him back. But in November 306 the cruel emperor Maximin came to Caesarea to keep his birthday. The place was, of course, *en fête*. It was the custom for the emperor on such occasions to treat the populace to some fine show of strange creatures from foreign countries, or of acrobats and jugglers. But the only novelty which Maximin had to offer was that of a pair of criminals to be exposed to the wild beasts. Before one of them was carried a placard announcing that he was a Christian, Agapius ; the other was a slave who had murdered his master. No sooner were they presented before Maximin than the emperor, amidst shouts of applause for his clemency, bestowed a free pardon upon the murderer, before he had even seen the wild beasts, and gave him his manumission from slavery. Agapius, on the other hand, after being led round the amphitheatre amidst the

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *De Mart. Palaest.* 3. Cp. *Texte und Unt.* (as above), p. 15.



derision of the spectators, was asked by the emperor whether he would abandon his Christianity, in which case he would be set at liberty. He refused, and with a loud voice called the multitude to witness that it was for no crime that he was condemned, but for his belief in the one Almighty God, and that for this belief he would gladly die, in order that his endurance might encourage younger Christians to despise death for the sake of eternal life. Upon this the cages were opened ; and Agapius ran and flung himself into the arms of a great she-bear, which tore him, but did not kill him. For one more night he was taken back to prison ; but the next day they tied stones to his feet, and dropped him into the sea.<sup>1</sup>

A similar death had been inflicted a little earlier in the year upon one in whom the historian Eusebius was more deeply interested. A young man of nineteen years of age, named Apphian, who belonged to a distinguished family in Lycia, had been sent by his heathen parents to complete his education at Beyrout. That city was as famous at the time for its luxurious vices as it was for its schools ; but Apphian was proof against the seductions of the society into which he was thrown, and surprised every one who observed him by the purity and severity of his life. When his course at Beyrout was ended, he returned to his Lycian home ; but during his absence, as it seems, he had embraced the Christian faith, and, finding the heathen atmosphere in which his parents lived intolerable, he determined to run away. Taking no means of subsistence with him, but casting himself wholly upon the providence of God, he found himself at Caesarea. It was the very place for

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *De Mart. Palaest.* 6. Cp. *Texte und Unt.* (as above), p. 47.

a studious young Christian. There was the vast library of the learned Pamphilus, who had gathered round him a community of students, of whom Eusebius himself was one. Apphian was welcomed into the community, to which a brother of his already belonged, and threw himself with ardour into the teaching of Pamphilus, living, like his master, a life of stern asceticism.

Apphian had been at Caesarea for nearly a year, when an edict was received, requiring the attendance of the whole population at sacrificial rites. Criers passed through the streets summoning men, women, and children to the temples, where military officers stood, furnished with lists of the inhabitants, and calling them over, name by name. Urban, the governor, was himself in the very act of pouring a libation, when the young Apphian, who had told no one what he intended to do, slipped through the band of soldiers and officials in attendance upon him, seized the governor by the right hand and bade him desist from the idolatrous proceeding. With gentle earnestness he warned him that it was not well to turn from the one true God and to sacrifice to devils.

Naturally the guards fell upon the audacious youth, and with no very merciful handling carried him off into the darkness of the prison, where they left him for the night with his legs stretched in the torturing stocks. Next day he appeared before Urban. The governor bade him sacrifice, and he refused. Then began a dreadful series of tortures. Again and again the young man's ribs were laid open. Blows fell about his head and neck till his face was so swollen and disfigured that no one could have recognised him. As he still remained firm, Urban told them to soak some rags in oil, and wrap them about his legs, and set fire to them.

The juices of his body exuded and dripped with the heat; but Apphian was undaunted. To all questions about himself, his origin, his lodging-place, he only replied from time to time that he was a Christian. They took him back once more to the prison, and next day he was sentenced to death by drowning. Eusebius himself and all the city of Caesarea with him were eyewitnesses of the sequel. An earthquake—no uncommon phenomenon in those parts—shook the city. A violent storm arose in the sea. Amidst the roaring and raging of the elements, the body of the young martyr was thrown up by the waves at the very gate of the city.<sup>1</sup>

His brother Aedesius was determined not to be outdone by Apphian. Superior to Apphian in learning, and well acquainted with Latin literature as well as Greek, he was condemned, soon after his brother's death, to servile labour in the copper mines of Palestine. Upon his release, he followed for some time the austere profession of a philosopher. He found himself at Alexandria when Hierocles, the governor of Egypt, pronounced a shocking sentence upon some Christian girls. The indignant Aedesius strode up to the magistrate and not only told him what right-minded men thought of such sentences, but with his right hand and his left slapped him in the face, and threw him backwards to the ground. A deed so like to that of Apphian was rewarded with a similar end, and after a course of tortures Aedesius, like his brother, was thrown into the sea and drowned.<sup>2</sup>

Five months after the martyrdom of Agapius at

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *De Mart. Pal.* 4; *Analecta Bolland*, xvi. p. 122. Cp. *Texte und Unt.* (as above), p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Eusebius, *De Mart. Pal.* 5; *Analecta Bolland*, xvi. p. 126. Cp. *Texte und Unt.* (as above), p. 43.

Caesarea, on the very day which the Church was keeping as Easter Sunday, a batch of Christian prisoners was sitting before the place of judgment, in the same city, awaiting trial, when a maiden named Theodosia approached to pay them her respects. She was a native of Tyre, and was not yet fully eighteen years old. She implored the brave confessors to remember her when they came to the Lord. The guards arrested her, as if she had committed a crime, and presented her before the governor. Upon her refusal to sacrifice, Urban had her sides and her breasts ripped open, but she bore the pain and indignity with a countenance of joy. Once more she was invited to sacrifice; but opening wide her young eyes and smiling at the governor, she said, "What makes you think like that? You are mistaken, man. I have got the very thing I prayed for. I am permitted to join the company of the martyrs." At length the governor commanded her to be thrown into the sea. The constancy of Theodosia made Urban deal less severely with the rest. He did not wish for any more such scenes at the moment. He said not a word to any of the prisoners. No torture was inflicted upon them. They were all condemned to the copper mines, and were led away in a body.<sup>1</sup>

In the following November—the fifth day of the month—Urban had a pitched battle with the Christians. "How much harm he did on that one day," says Eusebius, "we must now relate." He began by sending to the mines of Phaeno a priest of Gaza, named Silvanus, who lived to become a bishop and a martyr, together with a group of his followers, who had made a brave

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *De Mart. Pal.* 7; *Analecta Bolland.* xvi. p. 127. Cp. *Texte und Unt.* (as above), p. 52.

stand for their faith. But before sending them to their penal servitude he gave the shocking order that each of them was to have the sinews of one ankle made useless by being seared with a hot iron. A handsome and well-informed young man named Domninus, who had distinguished himself among the Christians of Palestine by the frequency and boldness of his confessions, and had already suffered in the mines, was burned alive. A reverend old man, by name Auxentius, was killed by the wild beasts. For others, the inventiveness of Urban was set to work to devise other punishments. Some were mutilated in a way too abominable to describe. Three fine strong young men were given over to the captain of the gladiators, to be prepared to fight for their lives in the deadly boxing-gloves of the time. These three, like the three young men in Daniel, refused to eat the daily portion provided for their nourishment, or to go through the required exercises. Their trainers, after some time, finding it impossible to do anything with such refractory subjects, reported them to the governor, and he in turn to the emperor Maximin himself. Maximin, seeing that neither starvation nor flogging had any effect upon them, ordered that the left foot of each should be disabled, and their right eyes cut out with knives and the bleeding sockets seared with hot irons, and that they should then be sent to the mines. Eusebius saw ninety-seven other Christians treated in this barbarous manner. They were Egyptians, who were transferred from the porphyry quarries of the Thebaid to Palestine; some of them were quite little children.<sup>1</sup>

But the deed which made that fifth of November so

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *De Mart. Pal.* 7 and 8. Cp. *Texte und Unt.* (as above), p. 58



sad, yet glorious, a day to Eusebius was the arrest of his special friend, the learned Pamphilus. Of all the men of his time, there was none, in the opinion of Eusebius, himself no mean judge, who could rival Pamphilus in his knowledge of the Bible. A native of Beyrout, and educated in the heathen schools of that city, he renounced wealth and secular distinction to devote himself to sacred studies. Selling all the ancestral property which had come down to him, and bestowing the proceeds upon the poor, he betook himself first to Alexandria, where he was taught by the famous presbyter, Pierius, and then, like Origen, to the capital of Palestine. There he set himself to carry on the work of Origen, not only by the direct instruction of scholars who repaired to him, but also in the textual criticism of the Bible. He made it his business to issue correct and scholarly copies of the Scriptures, free from the interpolations and false readings which had largely corrupted the books in common use. In these labours he found a zealous and effective helper in Eusebius. More than one Greek Bible is still in existence which was transcribed from copies said to have been made by Pamphilus and Eusebius with their own hands. Such copies were freely given away by the generous copyist. For Pamphilus was no mere student, without interest in his fellow-men. His name, as Eusebius points out, designated him as "the friend of all," and such he proved himself to be by open hand and open heart. The devotion which he inspired in others is shown by the example of Eusebius himself. Again and again when he refers to Pamphilus, instead of mentioning him directly, he speaks of "the name so dear to me." Pamphilus became to him "my lord and master; for I cannot speak in other terms of the holy and blessed

man." From the day of Pamphilus' death the affectionate disciple assumed his name, and chose to be spoken of as *Eusebius Pamphili*, "Eusebius the son of Pamphilus."

It was not, however, on that fifth of November 307 that the martyrdom of Pamphilus was attained. Upon that occasion, Urban the governor first listened with interest to a display of the eloquence and philosophical erudition of the famous scholar, and then invited him to sacrifice. Upon his refusal, he was submitted to excruciating tortures and thrown into the prison already crowded with Christian confessors. Almost immediately after, Urban fell into sudden disgrace with his master Maximin, and was executed at Caesarea itself, and another governor appointed in his place. Pamphilus lay apparently forgotten in his prison for two whole years. His time of respite was not spent in idleness. His friends had access to him; and during that period he composed with the help of Eusebius a work in six books in defence of Origen, which he addressed to the confessors who were labouring in the mines of Palestine.

There it seems as if he might have remained for ever but for an accidental circumstance. One day, in February 309—or perhaps Eusebius intends us to understand 310—a band of Egyptian travellers arrived at the gate of Caesarea. Their outlandish appearance attracted attention. There were five of them. Questioned by the guard at the gate, they made no secret of the fact that they were Christians. They were on a charitable tour. A gang of believers had lately been conveyed from Egypt to do penal servitude in Cilicia, and these five had accompanied them, to cheer them with their sympathy and attendance, and were now on

their way home again. They were arrested at once, and taken to Firmilian, the successor of Urban as governor of Palestine, who remanded them to prison for the night; and next day, February 16, not only the five strangers were brought to trial, but Pamphilus also, and his associates.

The one who appeared to be spokesman of the Egyptian company was the first to be called upon. It was the custom, Eusebius tells us, for these Egyptians, when they became Christians, to discard the names which they had hitherto borne, if the names contained a reference to Isis, or Osiris, or Serapis, or some other heathen god, and to assume instead some name which was hallowed by Scriptural associations, like Jeremias, or Samuel, or Daniel. The governor asked the prisoner's name, and received in reply one of these Bible names. It puzzled him, and he went on to ask the man's origin. The Christian said that his home was Jerusalem. No town that the governor knew of bore that name: the city which had once borne it had long been destroyed, and that which was afterwards built on the site was known, both by Roman officials and by people in general, as Aelia. Firmilian asked where Jerusalem was; and to make sure that the man should tell the truth, he had his arms twisted behind him, and his feet crushed in a newly invented form of boot. The tortured man repeated again and again that he was only telling the truth. He and his comrades were Israelites indeed; they were Jews inwardly. To all inquiries about their home and city he answered that it was the home of the godly alone, and that none but they might enter it, and that it lay in the very quarter of light, where the sun arises. So he and his comrades who stood by amused themselves at their judge's expense, utterly

regardless of the pains which he inflicted upon them. Firmilian, imagining that the Christians, driven to desperation, were massing in numbers on the eastern frontier of the empire with a view to war, plied the Egyptian with torture after torture, but the young man seemed to have no flesh and no body. He played his game to the end—he was going home to Jerusalem. At last Firmilian gave up the attempt to get anything more out of him, and ordered him to be beheaded. His four companions, some of whom were mere boys, were soon despatched to join him.

Then Firmilian turned his attention to Pamphilus and his companions. One of them, Valens, was a venerable man, far advanced in years. He was a deacon of the church at Aelia, the earthly Jerusalem, and had a wonderful knowledge of the Bible. He had committed to memory so large a portion of it as to stand in no need of the written book; wherever in it he was put on, Valens was able to continue. With him and Pamphilus was a third prisoner, named Paul. He belonged to the town of Jamnia in Palestine, and bore already upon his body the marks of previous suffering for his faith, where the hot irons had touched him. He was noted for his high spirit and his fervent zeal. These three men, after their long confinement, stood again before the magistrate; but when Firmilian heard, perhaps for the first time, what they had gone through on former occasions, he felt that it would be only a waste of time to endeavour once more to force them into apostasy. He only asked them whether they were now disposed to submit and to sacrifice. Each of them in turn gave his final refusal, and the governor sentenced them to be beheaded.

He had scarcely uttered the last sentence, and was

turning to leave the court, when a boy's voice rang through the building, requesting the delivery of the bodies for burial. The brave boy who thus lifted up his voice from among the crowd surrounding the judgment-seat, was a slave in the family of Pamphilus. His name was Porphyry. He was in his eighteenth year. His master valued him highly for the great beauty of his handwriting. All who frequented the house knew the charm of his grave and gentle manners. The pitiless Firmilian, however, was neither touched by Porphyry's youth, nor moved by the justice of the request. Ascertaining from the boy that he was a Christian, he applied himself and his executioners to break him of that profession. They handled his body as if it had been made of wood instead of flesh and blood. They went on with the business for a long time, until the boy could not speak and could hardly breathe. Then the brutal magistrate ordered them to take a piece of haircloth and rub it into the gashes which they had made in his sides. But no effect was produced, and Firmilian, tiring of the work, sentenced him to be burned alive in a slow fire. Clad only in the philosopher's cloak, which left his right arm and shoulder bare, the youth was led to the place of execution. His body was all covered with dust and blood, but his face was bright and full of spiritual exaltation. His mind was collected, and he spoke to those who knew him, and told them his last wishes with regard to his few possessions. The stake to which he was fastened was surrounded by faggots heaped up ; but they had been purposely arranged at a considerable distance from the stake, and the pile was lighted on the outside, in order that the fire might be the longer in reaching him. The first moment that the flame caught



him, Porphyry gave one loud cry, calling upon Jesus, the Son of God, to help him. It was the only word that passed from his lips. Eager to be gone, he thrust his head—for his hands were bound—first on one side and then on the other, where the fire came nearest, and with his open mouth sucked in the flames and died. So he preceded the master whom he loved.

The news of Porphyry's gallant death was carried to Pamphilus by a man of the name of Seleucus. A Cappadocian by birth, Seleucus had adopted the military profession, and rose high in the service. He was a man of commanding stature and presence, and remarkably handsome. At the very outset of the persecution he had been cashiered for his religion, and had endured the disgraceful punishment of scourging. Since that time, Seleucus had given himself up to a life of devotion and to works of mercy. The orphan and the widow, the poor, the sick, the friendless, knew well his tall figure and his strong arm. He had learned that such kindnesses were the sacrifices with which God is really pleased. Perhaps none of his charitable errands had ever given greater joy than when he brought word to Pamphilus and his companions of the glory which young Porphyry had won. Seleucus had bare time to deliver his message and to salute the group of martyrs with a brotherly kiss, when he was himself arrested by the soldiers and led to the presence of the governor. Firmilian made short work with him. He sent him back at once, to have his head cut off with the rest.

Of the death of Pamphilus himself no detail has been recorded ; but he was evidently beheaded soon after the death of Porphyry.

Firmilian was not even then at the end of his

bloody day's work. The great Pamphilus, Eusebius says, had set the door of heaven so wide open that day that it was easy for others to enter into the kingdom of God. The next to follow came from a quarter which gave Firmilian an unpleasant surprise. There was an old and trusted slave of his own, named Theodulus, who had long served the family with the utmost fidelity, and who had great-grandchildren in the same service. Theodulus was brought to his master, charged with the same offence as Seleucus — he had given the kiss of brotherhood to one of the martyrs. The exasperated Firmilian had the old man crucified at once.

Eleven Christians had been despatched on that one day. Another offered himself, as if to complete the mystic number of the Patriarchs and of the Apostles. An inhabitant of Caesarea, called Julian, had been away from home, and happened to return from his absence that very day. Before he entered the gate of the city some one informed him of what had taken place. Instantly, without going to his house, Julian made his way to the spot where his fellow Christians had been executed. As soon as he saw the headless bodies lying outstretched upon the ground, in an ecstasy of devotion he threw himself upon each of the sacred corpses in turn and covered them with kisses. The executioners interrupted him, and took him to the governor, who gave him the martyrdom which he coveted, by means of a slow fire like Porphyry's. Leaping and shouting with delight, Julian went to his burning, and poured out his thanksgivings to God, who had so wonderfully blessed his home-coming. Like Seleucus, Julian was born in Cappadocia. He was esteemed a man of meek and gentle character, and breathed the fragrance of the Holy Spirit.

By order of Firmilian the bodies of the martyrs lay for four days and four nights exposed to the beasts and birds of prey. But neither vulture, nor jackal, nor dog came near them ; and on the fifth day the Christians took them away and buried them reverently in a memorial chapel.<sup>1</sup>

These were not the only scenes of Christian fortitude which were witnessed at Caesarea during the early days of Firmilian's governorship. A company of Christians were taken into custody at Gaza, where they were occupied in listening to the reading of the Bible. Some of them were treated in the way that had now become usual: their left feet were disabled, and their right eyes burned out. Others were still worse handled. A maiden named Ennatha, on being threatened with a horrible fate, could not contain her burning indignation, but loudly expressed her detestation of the tyrant emperor, who entrusted the government of the province to so barbarous a judge. For this outspoken language Ennatha was first submitted to the lash, and then hoisted upon the torture-block to have her sides laid open. When she had lain there for an hour or so, bearing patiently the thrice-repeated application of the knife or claw, a woman's voice cried aloud to the judge out of the crowded court, "How long do you mean to torture my sister in that barbarous way?" The speaker was a woman of Caesarea, who had dedicated herself, like Ennatha, to a life of virginity. Her name was Valentina. She was of diminutive stature, and unattractive in appearance ; but her feelings were strong and her mind resolute. The sight of what they were doing to Ennatha was more than she could endure. Of

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *De Mart. Pal.* 7, 11 ; *Analecta Bolland.* xvi. p. 129. Cp. *Texte und Unt.* (as above), p. 74.

course she was instantly set before Firmilian, and declared herself a Christian. The judge attempted to persuade her to sacrifice, but she refused. They dragged her up to the low altar, upon which a fire was burning. Valentina saw her opportunity and seized it. Her hands were held, but she deliberately raised her foot, and kicked off the altar the preparations for sacrifice, and the fire that lay upon it. The enraged Firmilian had her placed forthwith upon the block, and inflicted upon her a worse slashing of the sides than any one present had ever seen inflicted before. Then taking her down still alive, he tied her and Ennatha fast to each other and burned them together at the stake.<sup>1</sup>

A man named Paul was sentenced to death at the same time as the two maidens, though the sword, and not the fire, was assigned to him. He had not been subjected to tortures, but was condemned after a single refusal to sacrifice. When he came to the place of execution, Paul begged the executioner to give him a few minutes of respite, which he granted. Paul then lifted up his voice and praised God for allowing him the honour of martyrdom. Then he prayed for those of his own religion, that God would speedily grant them their liberty again ; then for the unfriendly Jews, of whom a large number were present, that they might be brought to God through Christ. He went on to pray in like manner for the Samaritans, and for the heathen who were still wandering in ignorance of God, that they might come to the knowledge of Him, and accept the true religion. He prayed especially for the mixed company of bystanders, and for the executioner, who was listening, waiting to cut off his head, for the

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *De Mart. Pal.* 8. Cp. *Texte und Unt.* (as above), p. 60.

judge who had sentenced him, and the emperors by whose authority he acted, beseeching God that his death might not be reckoned against them for sin. The people who stood near were moved to tears, and spoke freely of his death as undeserved; but Paul calmly bared his neck, and held it in the best position to be severed, and so passed to his joy.<sup>1</sup>

Soon after the death of Paul there was a lull in the persecution, and many of the unfortunate prisoners in the mines were allowed to creep forth to such liberty as they were still capable of enjoying. But the lull was short. It was suddenly broken by a set of fresh injunctions to the civil and military authorities to enforce sacrifice more rigorously than before. Orders were given that every article sold in the markets should be sprinkled with drink-offerings, and that every one who availed himself of the public baths, which formed so large a part of the life of the time, should first partake of the sacrifices. The heathen themselves were disgusted at the length to which the government was going.

Great excitement was naturally felt among the Christians. Three men at Caesarea agreed together, and sprang upon the governor as he was performing sacrifice in the middle of the city, calling upon him loudly to desist from his error. There was no other God, they said, besides the Creator. On being questioned, they boldly confessed themselves Christians. Firmilian did not take the trouble to torture them, but ordered them to be beheaded. Their names were Antoninus, who was a presbyter; Zebinas, who came from Eleutheropolis; and Germanus. On the same day with them was slain a consecrated virgin from

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *De Mart Pal.* 8. Cp. *Texte und Unt.* (as above), p. 65.



Scythopolis—another Ennatha. She had not been concerned in the daring act of Antoninus and the others, and had already suffered at the hands of an unauthorised persecutor. There was an overbearing military officer named Maxys, who had long been a terror to the neighbourhood where he was stationed, who, with no commission from the magistrates, laid hold upon Ennatha, stripped off her clothes down to the waist, and had her dragged with thongs round Caesarea from market-place to market-place, and publicly flogged in each. At last he brought her to the governor, where she made a brave confession, and was sentenced to be burned alive.

Firmilian, as once before, gave orders that the remains of these sufferers were to be left unburied. Day and night they lay exposed, with sentinels to watch them. The guards, who kept at a distance the friends who would have buried them, did nothing to drive off the beasts and the birds which fed on carrion. All Caesarea, pagan as well as Christian, was sickened by the sight of pieces of human flesh, bones, and entrails, which these creatures carried about and fought over, and dropped even inside the gates of the city. This state of things went on for several days, and then a strange occurrence took place. "It was fine, clear weather," says Eusebius, "and the sky was brilliant and calm. Suddenly the pillars supporting the public colonnades which run through the city were seen to drip with what looked like tears. The streets and squares became mysteriously wet, though there was no discharge of moisture from the atmosphere. The saying passed from mouth to mouth that the earth itself, outraged at the horrors that had been perpetrated, wept, and that stones and lifeless wood mourned for what had

been done, to put to shame the human beings whom nothing could melt or touch. I know," says Eusebius, "that this will seem to those of a later time to be an absurdity and a fable, but it was not so to contemporaries who knew the truth."<sup>1</sup>

A little later another band of Egyptian Christians was arrested at the gates of Ascalon. They were bent on a similar errand to that of a company already mentioned. They were on their way to Cilicia, to minister to the wants of their fellow Christians in captivity there. Some of them were subjected to the same fate as those whom they were journeying to help, and were deprived of a foot and an eye. Three of them suffered death at Ascalon. One of the three, named Ares, was burned; the other two, Promus and Elias, were beheaded. A month or so later, a young ascetic, known by the name of Peter Absalom, was brought before the governor at Caesarea. The governor and the bystanders alike were moved at the thought of his young life being thrown away for reasons which they could not understand. They implored him to spare himself, and to have compassion upon his tender years; but Absalom valued his hopes of heaven more than life. He was sent to the fire. Bound to the same stake with him was a bishop of the once powerful but now dwindling sect which bore the name of the heretic Marcion. He had, Eusebius says, a zeal of godliness, though not according to knowledge. His name was Asclepius.<sup>2</sup>

While the martyrdom of Pamphilus and his companions was still fresh, two Christians from a distant part of Palestine came to the capital to visit the confessors.

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *De Mart. Pal.* 9. Cp. *Texte und Unt.* (as above), p. 66.

<sup>2</sup> Eusebius, *De Mart. Pal.* 10. Cp. *Texte und Unt.* (as above), p. 70.

The gate-keepers asked them their business. They made no secret of it. Thereupon they were taken to the governor. Firmilian put them under torture there and then, and sentenced them to the wild beasts. Two days later was the feast of the Fortune of the city, and one of the two men, called Hadrian, was given to the lion. The lion, however, did not kill him, and he died by the sword. Two more days passed, and Eubulus, the other, was brought out. Firmilian besought him earnestly to sacrifice, and so to purchase his liberty. Eubulus would not hear of it, and, like his friend, was first exposed to the beasts, and then put to the sword. His was the last of the long line of martyrdoms which took place at the town of Caesarea.<sup>1</sup>

But there were still a few more crowns to be won in other parts of Palestine. The persecution was languishing to its close. When the year 310—the eighth of the persecution—opened, the repressive measures against the Christians had been greatly relaxed. The maimed confessors in the mines of Phaeno had not been set at liberty, but, short of this, they were allowed to please themselves. With surprising hardihood they had even set apart places of Christian worship within the precincts of the mines.

One day, the successor of Firmilian in the government of the province—for Firmilian himself had been disgraced and beheaded, like Urban before him—paid a visit to the place. He felt constrained to report what he had seen to the emperor Maximin. Instructions were sent without delay from headquarters, in accordance with which the church in the mines was broken up. Some of the confessors were sent to Cyprus, some to the Lebanon, others to

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *De Mart. Pal.* 11. Cp. *Texte und Unt.* (as above), p. 103.

other parts of Palestine. Four of them were made an example of. They were all Egyptians. Two bishops, called Peleus and Nilus, a presbyter whose name is not recorded, and a layman called Paternuthius, who had distinguished himself by his devotion to the interests of others, were despatched to the officer in command of the troops in the district, who summoned them to renounce their religion, and, upon their refusal, burned them alive.

There were others to whom had been assigned a special location at Phaeno. They were persons who through old age, excessive mutilation, or other bodily infirmity, were incapable of work, and had been turned loose in a separate compound of their own. At the head of this group was a bishop who has been mentioned before, Silvanus of Gaza. Again and again since the first outbreak of the persecution Silvanus had been put to the proof, and had never failed. The Egyptian contingent was conspicuous in this group as in other circles of confessors. Among them was a man named John, who was gifted with a prodigious memory. He had lost the sight of his eyes before the persecution touched him ; but when he came into conflict with the magistrates he was not only condemned, like the rest, to lose a foot, but in wantonness of cruelty the scorching iron was applied to his blind eyes. John was a "philosopher," or monk ; and he committed to memory, both before and after his loss of sight, whole books of the Bible, so that he was able at an instant to produce out of his unseen storehouse law and prophecy and history, gospels and epistles. Eusebius relates how on one occasion he entered the church where John was standing up in the midst of a great congregation of people, reciting passages of Scripture. Judging only by the

voice, he supposed that it was an ordinary reader at the lectionary ; but on advancing a little further he saw, to his astonishment, the blind man delivering the inspired words to his fellow Christians who had the use of their eyes. It was to the philosophical historian a supreme proof of the reality and the supremacy of the human soul, that one whose bodily powers had been taken from him one after another should show such superiority over men of sound and perfect frames.

These Christians, unable to do anything else, spent their days in prayer and fasting, and in mutual encouragements and assistance. At length a missive came from Maximin to exterminate them. Nine and thirty of them, including Silvanus and John, were brought out and beheaded on the same day. So ended the tragic history of the martyrs of Palestine.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *De Mart. Pal.* 13. Cp. *Texte und Unt.* (as above), p. 105.



## CHAPTER XVI

### PHILEAS; TIMOTHY AND MAURA; DIDYMUS

THE see of Alexandria was held during the greater part of these troubled years by a holy bishop of the name of Peter. When the first break in the storm took place at Eastertide in the year 306, Peter put forth a series of canons, or regulations, for the treatment of Christians who had failed under the trial. Christians who had not broken the Church's rule by going to the magistrates of their own accord, but had been arrested, and after many tortures had given way, and had now been under penance for nearly three years, were to be readmitted to communion, because they bore in their bodies the marks of the Lord Jesus; but they were to prolong their Lent after Easter for another forty days that they might learn to be able to say to the tempter, like the Lord Himself, "Get thee hence, Satan; thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve." Another year's probation is assigned to those who had not been tortured, but whose spirits had been broken by the hardships and foul smells of the prison in spite of the bountiful alleviations which the brethren had supplied to them. This measure of extra discipline would teach them to long for deliverance from the far worse captivity of sin, and lead them to Him who said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me; because He hath anointed Me to set at liberty them that are

bruised." Men who had weakly surrendered at the beginning without suffering anything at all, but who now were penitent, were to take for their warning the parable of the fruitless fig-tree, from which fruit was expected—first for three years, and then for a year more, while due nourishment and culture was graciously bestowed upon it. If at the end of the fourth year there were not fruits worthy of repentance, the tree must be cut down. Some there were who had feigned submission to the edict, like David who feigned epilepsy when he was no epileptic. They had deceived the authorities into thinking that they had complied, and afterwards, like some in Cyprian's day, had obtained indulgences from stronger brethren who had stood firm in their confession. Indulgence or no indulgence, Peter insisted that they should do six months' penance before he would hear of their being restored to communion. Some base-minded Christians had sent Christian slaves to represent them at the sacrifices. The slaves who had been terrified into this dishonesty were to continue a year under penitential discipline, and learn that they were the servants of Christ and not of men; the masters were to be under the same discipline thrice as long, both for their hypocritical compliance with the heathen law, and for having compelled their "fellow-servants" to sacrifice, in order to save their own necks at the risk of those of their equals in Christ. Another class of penitents consisted of men who had been betrayed to the persecutors and had fallen, but, after their fall, had voluntarily come forward again and confessed their faith, and had been imprisoned for it, and tortured. These were to be joyfully welcomed at once to communion and all other Christian privileges;

“for a just man,” says the Scripture, “falleth seven times, and riseth up again.”

The prudent see of Alexandria had words of grave though kindly reproof for those who volunteered for martyrdom, even though they came well out of the trial; they were not to be refused communion, because it was for Christ's sake that they had done what they did: but they are reminded that Christ has bidden us pray that we might not enter into temptation. “Perhaps they are unaware,” says the considerate bishop, “how frequently our Master Himself withdrew from those who designed mischief for Him, and sometimes would not walk openly because of them; and when the time of His passion drew near, He did not deliver Himself up, but waited until they came against Him with swords and staves. He wishes us to skip from place to place when we are persecuted for His name's sake. It is not His will that we should present ourselves of our own accord to the attendants and men-at-arms of the devil, and bring upon them the guilt of additional deaths, compelling them to be more cruel than they would otherwise have been.” If any member of the clergy therefore had been guilty of such forbidden and self-seeking rashness, and had found himself unequal to the contest and had fallen, he was not to be allowed on his recovery to resume ministerial functions. Personal forgiveness was to be his, and the communion of the Church; but he had forfeited the right to minister to the souls of others by a behaviour so contrary to the spirit of the apostle who desired to depart and to be with Christ, but who saw that it was more needful for others that he should abide in the flesh, not seeking his own profit, but the profit of many, that they might

be saved. Yet the good bishop could not find it in his heart to censure those who, at the beginning of the persecution, standing at the judgment-seat and watching the sufferings of the martyrs, had been unable to contain their emotion, and had declared themselves Christians ; still less those who were present when their fellow Christians fell away under torture, and who felt that the defection of others was a challenge to themselves to show the adversary what believers think of torturing claws, and scourges, and the sharp sword, and the burning fire, and the whelming water. For men who in such circumstances offered themselves up, Peter has nothing but warm-hearted words of admiration.

Prayers were to be offered by the faithful for those whose flesh had proved too weak to endure under persecution. "It does no one any harm," says Peter, "to share the grief and pain of those who are lamenting and groaning for their parents or brethren or children who have been overcome. We know that in some cases the goodness of God has been bestowed in answer to the faith of others, both for remission of sins and for bodily health, and even for resurrection from the dead." Christians will therefore pray together for the fallen, through Him who is our Advocate with the Father and the propitiation for our sins. No blame is to be attached to those who have paid money to be left unmolested in their religion. They have shown their earnestness on its behalf by the pecuniary losses they have borne, which is more, says the good bishop, than many others have done. Their conduct is, according to his interpretation of the words, justified by the conduct of Jason and others spoken of in the Acts, who were drawn to the rulers of the city, but

were released on the payment of a consideration. Still less open to question was the conduct of those who had forsaken all their property and withdrawn into hiding, even if others were apprehended instead of them. St. Paul allowed himself to keep in the background, while Gaius and Aristarchus, his companions in travel, were dragged into the theatre. St. Peter was rescued from chains by an angel, though it cost the lives of four quaternions of soldiers who kept the prison. Jesus Himself in infancy was sent away from Bethlehem by a divine intimation, leaving the other babes of the district to be slaughtered and—as Peter of Alexandria supposed—Zacharias, the father of the forerunner, to be slain for his connivance, between the temple and the altar. Finally, “if any have been subjected to violent compulsion, and the gag has been put in their mouths and their arms have been tied, while they have remained firm in faith and purpose, so that their hands have been scorched by the fire of the unhallowed sacrifice to which they have been unwillingly brought near—as was the case with those in Libya, as the letter of the blessed martyrs in prison informs me, and others likewise who are their fellow-ministers—such men, especially when they have also the testimony of the other brethren, may continue in their ministry, and be counted among the confessors; and so in like manner may those who swooned under repeated tortures, and were unable to speak or utter a sound, or make a movement of protest against the futile violence done to them; for they gave no assent to their pollution, as I am informed once more by fellow-ministers. Every one shall be counted among the confessors who lives, like Timothy, in obedience to



him who says, 'Follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness ; fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life whereunto thou art called, and hast confessed the good confession before many witnesses.' "

It seemed in that spring, when Peter issued these large-minded regulations, that peril was over, and that the Church only needed to close up her ranks, and to repair her breaches. But not very long after they were issued, the holy author of them was compelled to put in practice the conduct which he had justified. Like his predecessor Denys, he fled from Alexandria ; and as Denys had been assailed as a deserter from his post by the hot-headed Germanus, so Peter in his concealment was forced to see his diocese and his province invaded and overrun by Meletius, the next to him in rank of the Egyptian bishops, who ordained priests without asking Peter's consent, overthrew Peter's arrangements, and left a schism in Egypt which even the great Council of Nicaea failed to heal, and which lingered on for at least a hundred years after both Meletius and Peter were dead.

The death of Peter came to him at last in the form that he would most have desired. His life had become one of ever-increasing severity. Penitence for past sin, which he thought to have been enough to exhaust the long-suffering of God, was joined to the strictest watchfulness over the present. On one occasion he is said to have been troubled by blasphemous thoughts. In his trouble he consulted the brave bishop Paphnutius, who some years later took part in the Council of Nicaea, where he showed the gaping socket out of which his eye had been dug in the persecution. Paphnutius, a man of sense as

well as courage, told him that, when he too had been tempted with such thoughts, he had replied to the tempter, "O evil one, this blasphemy against God is thine, and shall recoil upon thyself." When the persecution was near its end, a sudden order came from Maximin, giving no explanations, and Peter was seized and beheaded.<sup>1</sup>

The most eminent of the Egyptian prelates, who looked up to Peter as their "great bishop and father," was Phileas of Thmuis. A man of wealth and position before he became a bishop, he was also learned in secular and philosophic literature, and enjoyed great popularity among the townspeople, even among those who did not share his faith. Phileas, along with other bishops, was thrown into prison; but they succeeded in keeping up constant intercourse with their dioceses, and were justly indignant with Meletius for acting as if their sees were vacant.

Great part of one letter is preserved, in which Phileas addressed his flock at Thmuis not long before his death. He describes how the martyrs with whom he had been associated strengthened themselves by meditation upon the examples and promises contained in Holy Scripture, and especially the example of Jesus Christ Himself, "who was made man for us that He might extirpate all sin, and provide us with sustenance for our entrance into eternal life." "Therefore," he continues, "bearing Christ within them, the martyrs coveted earnestly the best gifts, and endured every distress and every outrage that could be desired, some of them not only once, but twice over; and, though the guards vied with each other against them to frighten them by acts as well as by

<sup>1</sup> Routh, *Rel. Sacr.* iv. 21 foll., esp. p. 80.

words, they did not abandon their conviction, because their perfect love cast out fear."

"Every one who pleased," says Phileas, "was at liberty to insult them. Some hit them with sticks, some with rods, others with whips, or thongs, or ropes. The spectacle of outrage was constantly shifting; the utmost malice was employed. Some had their hands tied behind their backs, and every member of their bodies racked as they hung on the hobby-horse. Then, when they were in that condition, the torturers went to work, by order, upon all parts of their bodies: the rule with murderers is to torture them only on the sides, but they punished the martyrs on the belly, the shins, and the cheeks. Others were hung up aloft on the portico by one hand, to bear that worst of all pains which comes from the tension of the joints and limbs; others were fastened to the pillars, facing one another, their feet not reaching the ground, so that their weight bore upon the ropes and tightened them. And this they endured not only during the time that the governor was talking to them and at leisure to attend to them, but almost the whole day; for when he turned to others, he left his apparitors to keep an eye on the earlier cases, on the chance that one or another might show signs of giving way under the suffering. He ordered the chains to be mercilessly tightened; and then, when the men fainted, he told the officials to lay them on the ground and drag them away, for no heed whatsoever was to be bestowed upon them; they were to be thought of and dealt with as dead men. Here was a second form of torture invented by the enemies, to follow upon the wounds they had inflicted. Some there were who after the tortures were left lying

on the hobby, with both feet stretched to the length of four holes, so that they were forced to lie back upon the hobby, although they could not bear it, because their bodies were all covered with flesh wounds. Others, flung upon the ground, lay there, unable to move because of the accumulated injuries which they had suffered, and presenting to the beholders a sight more dreadful than the infliction itself, because they bore upon their persons so many different devices of torment. Some of them actually expired under torture, thus putting the adversary to shame by their steadfastness ; others, already half-dead when they were committed to prison, were perfected after not many days by the pains which crushed them. The rest, receiving restorative treatment, became bolder in course of time during their sojourn in prison. So, when the choice was given them either to touch the abominable sacrifice, and obtain an accursed liberty, and have no more trouble, or on the other hand to be sentenced to death on refusing to sacrifice, without a moment's hesitation they went gaily to their deaths. For they knew what is laid down for us by the Holy Scripture, 'He that sacrificeth to other gods, he shall be utterly destroyed,' and 'Thou shalt have none other gods but Me.'"<sup>1</sup>

The turn of Phileas himself came ; but he was spared the horror of those tortures which he so graphically describes. Culcian, a trusted friend of Maximin, was by that time prefect of Egypt. He shrank from treating the learned bishop like an ordinary criminal. Perhaps no recorded trial since those of Cyprian and Achatius, fifty years before, has the same kind of interest as that of Phileas.

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* viii. 10.

“Phileas was placed in the dock. Culcian, the governor, said to him, ‘Can you now be brought to reason?’ Phileas answered, ‘I have always lived reasonably, and am reasonable now.’ ‘Sacrifice to the gods.’ ‘I do not sacrifice.’ ‘Why not?’ ‘Because the sacred and divine Scriptures say, He that sacrificeth unto any god, save unto God only, he shall be utterly destroyed.’” Culcian was ready to meet his prisoner on that point. “Then sacrifice to God only,” he said. If the act were performed, he would not quarrel about the name. “No,” answered Phileas; “God does not desire such sacrifices. The Scriptures say, ‘To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto Me? saith the Lord. I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of lambs; and I delight not in the blood of he-goats. Offer me no fine flour.’” One of the advocates in court burst in, “Has fine flour anything to do with your case? are you not pleading for your life?” “What sacrifices does your God delight in?” asked the governor. “God delights in a clean heart,” answered the bishop, “and in pure thoughts, and in the sacrifice of true speech.” “Now offer.” “I do not offer; I have never learned to do it.” Culcian had some acquaintance with Christianity. “Did not Paul offer sacrifice?” he said. “God forbid,” was the answer. “Nor Moses?” “Only the Jews,” Phileas answered, “were commanded to sacrifice, to none but God, and only at Jerusalem. The Jews do wrong now, by celebrating their rites in other places.” “A truce to these idle words; sacrifice even now.” “I will not defile my soul.” “Do we endanger our souls by it?” “Yes, both soul and body.” “This body?” “Yes, this body.” “Will this flesh of ours rise again?” “Yes.”



Culcian suddenly returned to what he had heard about St. Paul. "Paul denied Christ, did he not?" "No," said Phileas; "God forbid." Another sudden change of subject: "I have sworn the oath; do you swear too." "We are not bidden to swear. The Holy Scripture says, Let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay." "Paul was a persecutor, was he not?" "No; certainly not." "Paul was no scholar. He was a Syrian, was he not, and taught in Syriac?" "No; he was a Hebrew, and he taught in Greek. He had the loftiest wisdom that ever man had." "Perhaps you will tell me," said the philosophical magistrate, "that he was superior to Plato." "He was not only wiser than Plato," replied Phileas, "but wiser than all the philosophers put together. He made converts of wise men, and, if you please, I will tell you what he said." "Come now, sacrifice." "I do not sacrifice." "Have you a conscientious objection?" "Yes." "Then why does not your conscience tell you to do what is right by your wife and children?" "Conscience towards God has the higher claim. The Bible says, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, who made thee." "What God is that?" Phileas spread out his hands towards heaven, and answered, "The God who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all things that are therein; the Creator and Maker of all things visible and invisible; the God whom words cannot express, who alone is and abides for ever. Amen."

The advocates wished to stop Phileas from further speech. "Why," they said, "do you withstand the governor?" Phileas replied, "I am only answering his own question." Culcian said curtly, "Spare your tongue, and sacrifice." "I do not sacrifice," the bishop once more replied; "I wish to spare my soul.

Christians are not the only people who thus spare their souls. Gentiles do the same. Remember Socrates, for instance. When he was led to death, though his wife and children stood by, he would not turn back, but drank the deadly hemlock cheerfully." "Was Christ a god?" the governor asked abruptly. "Yes," said Phileas, "Christ was God." "What makes you think that he was a god?" "He made the blind to see, the deaf to hear; He cleansed the lepers, raised the dead, restored speech to the dumb, and healed many sicknesses. A woman with an issue of blood touched the hem of His garment, and was made whole. After His own death, He rose again; and He did many other signs and wonders besides." "And God was crucified, was He?" "He was crucified for our salvation. He knew that He should be crucified and should suffer shame, and freely gave Himself to endure all for us. The Holy Scriptures had foretold these things concerning Him,—the Scriptures which the Jews think they hold, but do not. Let any one who wishes come and see whether this is not the case."

"You remember," said Culcian, "that I have paid you a compliment. I might have disgraced you in your own city; but I wished to pay you a compliment, and forbore." "I am much obliged to you," answered the bishop, "and only beg you to complete the obligation." "What is your desire?" "That you would do your worst upon me. Do what you have been ordered to do." "Do you wish to die for nothing?" "Not for nothing, but for God and for the truth." "Paul, now," said Culcian, "was he a god?" "No." "What was he, then?" "A man like us; only the Spirit of God was in him, and by the Spirit he did miracles and signs and wonders."

The heathen brother of Phileas was present in court. "I make a present of you to your brother," said the judge. "Do me a still greater favour," said Phileas; "use all your power upon me, and do as you are bidden." "If I knew that you were a poor man," answered Culcian, "and that want had driven you into this madness, I would not spare you. But you have plenty of wealth; you could maintain almost the whole province, as well as yourself; so I wish to spare you, and to persuade you to offer." "I cannot offer," said Phileas; "I say it to spare myself." The advocates interposed again. "He has already offered," they said, "in the school yonder." "I did nothing of the sort," he cried. "Your poor wife," said the governor, "is making for you." "The Lord Jesus Christ is the Saviour of all our spirits," said the saint,—"whom I serve in bonds. He who has called me to the inheritance of His glory is able to call her also." "Phileas asks for a remand," called out the advocates. "I grant you a remand," the governor said to him, "that you may reflect." "I have reflected many times," he answered, "and have elected to suffer with Christ."

Then a striking scene took place. The friendly advocates, the officials who attended the prefect, the curator or mayor of Thmuis, joined with the family of Phileas, and threw themselves at the bishop's feet, imploring him to think of his wife and children. "He, like a rock washed by the waves which cannot move it, rejected their clamorous words. His mind was set towards heaven, and he kept God before his eyes, and said that it was duty to think of the holy martyrs and apostles as his kinsfolk and near friends."

Phileas was accompanied by a Christian of high

position in the civil service, whose name was Philoromus. Seeing Phileas beset by his weeping friends and by the machinations of the governor, Philoromus urged them to allow Phileas to follow his own mind. Culcian gave sentence that both Phileas and Philoromus should be beheaded. As they were on the way to the place of execution, the brother of Phileas, who was himself one of the advocates practising in the prefect's court, cried out that Phileas desired to have his sentence cancelled. Culcian called the bishop back, and asked on what grounds his appeal was based. "I made no appeal," answered Phileas; "God forbid that I should. Pay no attention to this unhappy man. I have nothing but gratitude to the emperors and the government, for I am made a fellow heir with Jesus Christ." Then Phileas went forth. When they reached the spot, Phileas stretched out his hands towards the east, and addressed a short exhortation to the Christians within hearing; then, after an ascription of glory to the Spotless One, who sitteth upon the cherubim, and who is the Beginning and the End, the two men received the headsman's stroke, and "their unconquerable spirits were set free." <sup>1</sup>

A powerful and touching poem of Charles Kingsley's has made known to many English people the names of Timothy and Maura, who suffered—apparently in that part of Egypt known as the Thebaid—a year or so earlier than Phileas. Timothy was a reader in the town to which he belonged. One of the first objects of this persecution was to destroy the sacred books of Christianity, and Timothy was required by the magistrate to give up his books. He refused, saying—though the story has not come down to us in such a

<sup>1</sup> Ruinart, p. 434; Knopf, p. 102.

form that we can entirely rely upon the words which are put into the mouths of the martyrs—that the books were as dear to him as children. He refused likewise to sacrifice, and torture was used to compel him. Hot spits were thrust into his ears. He lost the sight of his eyes under the torment. Arrian, the magistrate, ordered him to be treated like some of those of whom Phileas speaks ; he was to be fastened head downwards to one of the pillars of the colonnade, with his mouth in a gag and a stone round his neck.

The executioners themselves hesitated to inflict so horrible a punishment, and came to Arrian and suggested that milder methods might be more efficacious. The man was newly married, they said. It was not quite three weeks since the wedding. Perhaps the young wife might be able to persuade him. Arrian sent for Maura. He told her that he was sorry to think of her being left a widow at her age, and bade her put on her best looks and induce her husband to conform. She did what she could. The gag was taken from Timothy's mouth to enable him to answer her ; but the only use which he made of his lips was to implore his father, the priest Poecilus, to throw something over his head, that he might not see the temptress.

The story ascribes to Maura a pathetic expostulation, which throws light upon the manners and customs of the time. She did not deserve such treatment, she said. Timothy did not yet know her, nor was she yet really at home in his house. He could not suspect her of being unfaithful to him during these twenty days of married life. Why should she be left a widow ? Why did he wish to die ? Was he in debt ? Had he been arrested for not paying taxes that were due ?



She would give him all her wedding ornaments ; they would sell all they had in the house and pay it off. Then she tried another way of arguing. When Saturday and Sunday came, who was to read Timothy's books instead of him ?

Timothy answered her patiently, and entreated her to join with him, and to go with him to the Saviour, who would not impute their trespasses to them if they went to Him freely. The poor girl (she was only seventeen) replied that that was what she longed to do, but that she did not know that she might. She thought she was not good enough, but what her husband had said did her good, and for his sake she would try to be better. Timothy told her to go to the governor, and say what she thought of these proceedings. "O brother Timothy," she cried, "I am afraid that when I see the governor angry, and all the dreadful tortures, I shall not be able to bear the pain." "Hope in the Lord Jesus Christ," he answered, "and the tortures will be like oil poured over you."

She went. The magistrate offered to find her a fine husband, instead of Timothy, if she would abandon her religion. Upon her refusal, she went through a variety of horrors. One saying ascribed to her has a sound of truth about it. They put her into a caldron of hot water. The brave girl mocked at the temperature. "If you have not fuel enough to heat it," she said, "send to my father. He is a builder. He will give you a cartload of wood to heat this caldron."

At length the governor gave sentence that the husband and wife should be crucified, face to face. For more than a week, it is said, they hung there, with the well-known powers of endurance which belonged to their race, still alive, conversing with one another.

They agreed together not to seek relief in sleep, lest the Lord should come, and be wroth at finding them sleeping. Sleep came, however, from time to time. unbidden, and with it the dreams that were natural in their situation.

“Wake up, brother,” cried Maura at one time ; “I saw, in a kind of trance, a man standing before me with a cup of milk and honey in his hand, and he said to me, ‘Take this, and drink.’ And I said to him, ‘Who art thou?’ He answered, ‘An angel of God.’ Then I said to him, ‘Arise, then, and let us pray.’ But he said, ‘I came because I had compassion on thee, because thou wast fasting till the ninth hour, and wast hungry.’ I answered, ‘What makes thee to speak like that? Why may I not suffer and endure? Knowest thou not that, when we pray, God grants us things that are impossible?’ And when I began to pray I saw him turn away from me, and I perceived at once that it was a device of the enemy, who desired to overcome us upon the cross ; and forthwith he departed from me.”

Another time : “One came and led me to a river that flowed with milk and honey, saying to me, ‘Drink.’ And I said, ‘I have already said that I will not drink water, nor taste any other kind of drink, until I drink Christ’s cup, which is mingled for me by death unto salvation and everlasting life.’ The man himself drank ; and as he did so the river was changed, and the man departed from us.”

In a third dream : “One stood by me in comely raiment, with his face shining like the sun ; and he grasped me by the hand, and took me into heaven, and showed me a throne made ready, with a white robe and a crown upon it. I was astonished, and said,

‘Whose are these, my lord?’ And he answered me, ‘These are the rewards of thy victory; the throne and crown are prepared for thee.’ Then he took me somewhat higher, and showed me another throne, which likewise had a white robe and a crown; and when I asked whose they were, he said, ‘These are thy husband Timothy’s.’ Then I prayed him to tell me why there was a distance between the thrones, and he said to me, ‘There is a great difference between thee and thy husband. Knowest thou not that it is through him and his exhortation that thou wilt receive the crown? Go thy way, therefore, and return to thy body until the sixth hour. To-morrow the angels will come to receive your souls, and to carry them to heaven. But watch ye, that the enemy may not again assail you.’ ”<sup>1</sup>

No martyrs of the time showed greater fortitude than those of the Thebaid. Sometimes, Eusebius tells us, they were scraped to death with potsherds. Women were hung up by one foot, head downwards, without a shred of clothing. Some were tied up to the trunks of trees, and there left to die. There were cases in which the branches of neighbouring trees were brought together by mechanical appliances, the legs of the martyr secured to the two branches, and then the branches released, so as to rend the unhappy creature asunder. This kind of thing lasted, not for a few days, but for years together. The number of the sufferers was great. Ten, twenty, thirty, even sixty, and as many as a hundred were put to death in one day—men, women, and quite young children. Nothing could daunt the enthusiasm of the believers. “As soon as sentence was pronounced upon one batch,

<sup>1</sup> *Acta Sanctorum*, May 3.

another batch made their appearance from somewhere else, and sprang upon the daïs where the magistrate sat, confessing themselves Christians, offering themselves without concern to torture in all its various horrible shapes, without a moment of fear, giving open expression to their confident devotion to Almighty God, and receiving the sentence of death with joy and laughter and merriment, singing psalms and hymns, and offering thanksgivings to God with their last breath.”<sup>1</sup>

The great French tragedian who dramatised the friendship of Polyeuctus and Nearchus attempted also to dramatise the story of two Egyptian martyrs, belonging to this period, whose names were Didymus and Theodora. Perhaps the story, as it has come down from antiquity, is as affecting as in the form given to it by Corneille.

The judge called for Theodora. The officers of the court presented her. “What is your rank?” he asked. “I am a Christian.” “Free-woman or slave?” “I have told you, I am a Christian. Christ’s coming set me free. So far as this world goes, I was free born.” “Call the curator of the city.” He came. “Tell me,” said the judge, “what you know of this girl, Theodora.” The curator said that she was of a respectable family. Theodora had taken the vows of a virgin. “Why,” asked the judge, “if you are of good family, did you not wish to be married?” “For Christ’s sake,” she answered; “His coming in the flesh delivered us from corruption, and brought to us eternal life. I will not abandon my faith in Him, and I am determined to live a life of virginity.” The judge replied by telling her of the monstrous order by which

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* viii. 9.

Christian women of her views were to be reduced to compliance by physical outrages. Probably Theodora was already acquainted with the order. "I think that you must know," she is said calmly to have replied, "that the Lord has regard to men's wills. God sees the chastity of the intention. If you compel me to this, it is no sin of mine, but a thing violently inflicted upon me." "Do not bring shame upon your family," said the judge; "it is a disgrace which will never be forgotten." "Christ," she answered, "will know how to preserve His own turtle-dove." "Why are you so misguided," he said, "as to trust a man who was crucified? Do not flatter yourself that you will be kept from stain in the place that I shall send you to." Theodora's answer showed that her spirit was not shaken.

"I have borne with your speeches," said the judge, "and have not yet applied torture to you; but if you persist in your opposition, you must be treated like any slave girl. I must see that the commands of our lords, the emperors, are performed in your case, as an example to other women." Theodora answered that her body was in the judge's power, but that God alone had power over her soul. "Slap her pretty sharply with the palms of your hands," said the judge, "and say to her, 'Do not be a fool, but go near and sacrifice to the gods.'" "By the Lord," she answered, "I will not sacrifice, nor worship devils, when I have the Lord for my helper." "Foolish woman," said the judge, "you compel me to do what is an insult to a lady like yourself, to throw you into the hands of such a rabble as is waiting for your sentence to be pronounced." Theodora replied that it was no folly to confess the Lord, and that what the judge called shame would turn



to her everlasting glory. He answered that he could wait no longer ; he had waited in the hope of persuading her, but if he spared her any longer he would be disobeying the imperial orders. "As you are afraid," the girl answered, "and make haste to do as you are bidden, so I make haste not to deny my Lord. I am afraid to despise the true King."

The judge said that he would give her three days' grace. If at the end of that time she was not more compliant, he swore that he would send her to a bad place. She only begged him to guarantee that no harm should be done to her before the three days expired. At the end of the time her mind was unchanged ; the revolting sentence was pronounced, and Theodora was taken away to a den of sin and infamy.

But the Lord in whom she had trusted did not desert her. The first person who entered the chamber where Theodora was confined was the Christian Didymus. Wrapping himself in a soldier's cloak and crushing a large hat over his head, he pushed his way through the crowd of people who were amusing themselves by watching the house ; and giving the hat and cloak to Theodora, he insisted upon her escaping in them and leaving him in her stead. He told her to hang her head low, and to speak to nobody.

When Didymus was discovered, he was of course taken to the magistrate. The magistrate asked, who put it into his head to do what he had done. "God sent me to do it," was the simple answer. "Confess before you are tortured," said the magistrate, "where Theodora is." "By Jesus Christ, the Son of God," replied Didymus, "I do not know where she is. I only know and am sure that she is the handmaid of God, and that having confessed Christ she was preserved

from stain. It is not my doing, but the Lord's. God has dealt with her according to her faith, as you very well know if you would confess it." Didymus was sent to execution, and died thanking God for having favoured and blessed his device for the preservation of Theodora.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ruinart, p. 351.

## CHAPTER XVII

### PHILIP AND HERMES; IRENE AND HER SISTERS

ACROSS the narrow seas from Nicomedia, where the last of the persecutions began, lay the great province of Thrace. That part of it of which the capital was Heraclea was governed at the time by a magistrate of the name of Bassus. The wife of Bassus was herself a Christian, and this circumstance made the governor disinclined to proceed against the Christians more severely than he was compelled to do. For nearly a year after the persecuting edict the Christian assemblies were not interfered with, and the church buildings remained standing.

The Bishop of Heraclea was a venerable man, named Philip. When the feast of the Epiphany was approaching—the feast which at that time and in that country commemorated the Nativity of Christ—the Christian people of the city urged him to escape, as there were signs that Bassus could no longer resist the pressure brought to bear upon him. He refused to leave his post. “Let the heavenly commandment be fulfilled,” he said. He told them that Christ would give to His soldiers power to endure and good reward for their endurance, and that he was convinced that the purpose of the enemy would be defeated.

While he was speaking, a police officer appeared upon the scene, charged by Bassus to close the church door against the Christians, and to set a seal upon it.

The bishop's only reply was that it was "a foolish and dreary persuasion" which thought that God dwelt within the walls of a building, and not in the hearts of men. Next day, the officer made an inventory of all the furniture and utensils of the church, and sealed the place up, and departed. The sorrow of the brethren was great. Philip could not be torn from the spot. He "leaned against the doors of the Lord's house," and concerted measures with his clergy for the discipline and safeguarding of his flock.

It was not very long after that Bassus visited Heraclea, and found Philip with the rest outside the church, where they had boldly assembled for divine service at the closed doors. The governor took his official seat, and the law-breakers were brought before him. "Which of you," he asked, "is the master of the Christians, or teacher of the church?" Philip said that it was he. "You have heard," said the governor, "the law of the emperor, who forbids the Christians to assemble anywhere, and commands that the adherents of that body throughout the world should return to the sacrifices, or pay the penalty with their lives. Therefore you must submit to our examination whatever vessels you have of gold or silver or of any other metal or ornamental work; the Scriptures also, which you use in reading or teaching. If you demur to do this, you will be tortured till you do so." Philip answered, "If, as you say, you are pleased to torture us, our courage is prepared to endure it. You have this weak body in your power; tear it in pieces with such cruelty as you will. Only do not suppose that you have any power over my soul. As for the vessels that you ask for, you shall have presently whatever we possess; for when you compel us to it, we easily despise such things.

We do not worship God with precious metals, but with fear ; nor is it the adornment of the church which pleases Christ, but the adornment of the heart. But the Scriptures it would neither be right for you to receive nor for me to give."

Upon this answer, the governor ordered the torturers to come. They tried their inhuman hands upon Philip for a long while in vain. At last his faithful deacon, Hermes, who was standing by, burst out, "Even if we were to surrender to you all our Scriptures, harsh examiner, so that there should be no traces left anywhere in the world of this true tradition of ours, yet our descendants, in memory of their forefathers, and for their own souls' good, will compose greater Scriptures, and will teach yet more earnestly the fear that we owe to Christ."

It was a daring thing on the part of the bishop to make light of the vessels of the sanctuary, and to be prepared to surrender them under compulsion ; but it was a more daring thing still for the deacon to picture to himself a yet more ample collection of sacred writings when the heathen should succeed in abolishing the Bible from off the face of the earth. After this sublime answer, the deacon entered, but not until he had been scourged for a long while, into the hidden chamber where the vessels and the sacred books were stored. He was followed by one of the governor's assessors, whom Hermes detected in the act of secret-ing for his own purposes some of the valuable articles on the list. Hermes expostulated with him, and the dishonest official struck him in the face, and drew blood. When Bassus heard what had happened he was very angry with his assessor, and humanely gave orders that the deacon's hurt should be attended to.



The vessels and the Scriptures were delivered to the police. Philip and the rest, guarded on either side, were led to the forum, to gratify the people by the spectacle, and to strike fear into any possible imitators.

The governor returned to his official residence. He had set his hand to the work, though late, and was determined to see it through. Men were sent up to the roof of the church to strip the tiles off. They were beaten with the lash to make them work faster. Soldiers laden with copies of the Scriptures made their way to the forum, where a bonfire had been lighted, into which they flung the books, amidst a throng of the townspeople and of visitors to the place.

Philip and the rest were under custody in the market place, when Hermes saw a heathen priest, attended by his subordinates, carrying the materials for an idolatrous sacrifice and feast. He drew the attention of his fellow Christians to the sight. "They will certainly endeavour to pollute us," he said. "Let the good pleasure of the Lord be done," answered the bishop. At this point Bassus reappeared, accompanied by a great crowd of people, among whom it was soon apparent that sympathies were divided. Some were sorry for the Christians; others, especially the Jews, of whom there were large numbers in the province, as there had been in the time of St. Paul, clamoured for violent measures to be taken against them.

Then ensued this dialogue between the governor and the bishop. "Offer victims to the deity." "How can I who am a Christian worship a piece of stone?" "Sacrifices must be paid to our sovereign lords." "We have been taught to obey our betters, and to pay homage to the emperors, but not worship." "Well, then, at any rate sacrifice to the Fortune of the city.

See how beautiful, how smiling she is, and how graciously she welcomes the devotion of all the people." "You who worship her may take pleasure in her ; but human art cannot detach me from my duty to God." "Let this image of Hercules"—whose name the city bore—"appeal to you, so colossal, and yet so handsome." The bishop indignantly refused.

Bassus could not help admiring the constancy of Philip. He turned to the deacon, Hermes, and told him to sacrifice. "I do not sacrifice," he answered ; "I am a Christian." "Tell me what your rank is," said the judge. "I am a decurion," he said,—that is a member of the local senate,—“and I follow my teacher in everything.” Bassus caught at the suggestion. "If Philip can be induced to sacrifice," he said, "will you follow his example?" "No," said Hermes ; "neither should I follow him, nor will he be overcome. He and I are of the same force and of the same courage." "You shall be burned," said the magistrate, "if you persist in this madness." "The fire with which you threaten me," he replied, "has but little heat, and is quenched almost before it is kindled. You do not know the violence of the everlasting flames, which burn without ceasing, and consume the disciples of the devil in slow destruction." "Sacrifice, then, to our lords the emperors, and say, 'All hail, our sovereign lords.'" "We are hastening to life," was the answer of Hermes. "Sacrifice, I say," rejoined Bassus, "if you seek for life, and so escape the horrors of imprisonment and cruel tortures." "You will never persuade us to that, ungodly judge," said Hermes ; "your threats will strengthen our faith and courage, and will strike no faithless terror into us."

Bassus sent them away to gaol. As they went

along, some rough hand pushed the aged bishop with such violence that he fell upon the ground. When he rose to his feet the act was repeated, and repeated more than once. But the countenance of the saint betrayed no sign either of resentment or of pain. The confessors raised their voices in a psalm, thanking God who had given them a strength beyond their own, and so delivered themselves over into prison. There for a few days they remained ; but the lenient Bassus soon allowed them to be transferred to a private house adjoining the prison, where they abode, like St. Paul at Rome, with a soldier or two to keep them. Disciples and inquirers flocked to them, and many converts were made. The numbers were so great that offence was taken, and Bassus was compelled to send them again into the prison. It so happened that the prison adjoined the theatre, with a secret entrance into the corridor which ran round it ; and by the connivance of the gaolers, as it must be supposed, the spacious hall of entertainment became a Christian school, to which people resorted both by day and by night, to learn from the prisoners, and to cover the feet of Philip with kisses.

But Bassus' tenure of office came to an end. He was succeeded by one Justin, who had no believing relatives to soften him towards the Christians. Philip was set before his tribunal by the chief magistrate of the town of Heraclea, and was asked whether he was a Christian bishop. He said that he was, and that he could not deny it. "Our lords have thought good," the new governor began, "to command that all Christians who will not do it of their own accord shall be compelled to sacrifice, and punished in case they refuse. Spare your advanced age there-

fore, that I may not have to submit you to hardships which would be too great even for the young." Philip answered, "You have received commandments from men like yourselves, and you obey them for fear of a brief penalty: how much more ought we to comply with the commandments of God, who awards to those who deserve it a punishment that never ends?" "It is our duty to obey the emperors," said Justin. Philip replied, "I am a Christian, therefore I cannot do as you say. Your orders are to punish, not to compel." "You do not know," the other answered, "what tortures surround you." Philip answered, "You may torture me, but you cannot subdue me. No one will ever induce me to sacrifice." "You shall be dragged by the feet," said the cruel governor, "through the middle of the city, and, if then you are still alive, you shall be taken back to prison to be tortured afresh." "You are welcome," the bishop answered, "to confirm what you say, and to wreak your ungodly will." So Justin gave sentence that he should be dragged by the feet through the city. Some Christian brethren at length took the bruised and bleeding body from the ground, and carried it to the prison.

A priest called Severus had been for some time in close hiding, and could not be found; but he now came forward of his own accord. The judge bade him take warning by the fate of his teacher Philip, and to love life and accept its pleasures. Severus answered, "I cannot but hold fast what I have learned, and be faithful to my religion." "Think what the penalty is," said Justin, "and what it is to be spared it, and you will see that it is desirable to sacrifice." The mention of sacrifice fired the mind of Severus with indignation and horror; and the judge sent him away to prison.

Hermes was then called. Justin warned him not to incur the punishments of the other two. Hermes was a father ; the judge bade him think of the interests of his children, and to sacrifice. Hermes replied, "You will never induce me to do what you demand. In this faith I grew up. My holy master impressed this truth upon me from my cradle. I cannot falter in it now, nor in any way turn aside from it. Rend me therefore as you like ; I deny nothing." "You do not know," cried the judge, "the evil that is before you. It is ignorance which makes you confident. When you have been put under torture, it will be too late to be sorry." Hermes answered, "However severe may be the pains that you lay upon us, Christ, for whom we suffer, will assuage them for us by His angels."

After a couple of days in which they were tempted by gentler treatment, and lodged in the comforts of an inn, the Christian confessors endured a rigorous confinement of seven months at a stretch. Then orders came that they were to be taken to Adrianople, where they were entertained in a suburban house until the arrival of the governor. The weary round of argument and answer, of torture and outrage, began again, but without effect. Hermes, in particular, was assailed by the kindly intended efforts of the officials of the court. He had himself at one time been the chief magistrate of Heraclea, and in that capacity had won all hearts among his subordinates by his thoughtful kindness. Now they attempted to repay him by their anxiety to save his life. Hermes found it a relief to get back into his prison, and so to escape from their mistaken affection. After three days more in prison, they were questioned once again, and then the governor, after consulting with his council, pronounced



sentence upon them, that as, by their disobedience to the emperors, they had forfeited the name of Romans, they were to be burned alive.

The bishop had been so much injured by his tortures that he could not walk, and was carried to the place of execution. Hermes was not much firmer on his feet, but he made his way as best he could, cheerfully remarking to Philip as they went that they would not need that mode of progression much longer. He told some of those who accompanied him that he had received beforehand an assurance of his coming martyrdom. He had fallen into a pleasant sleep, and dreamed that a white dove had flown into the chamber, and lighted upon his head ; then it moved and settled upon his breast, and offered some pleasant food to his lips. By this he knew that the Lord was pleased to call him, and had bestowed upon him the gift of martyrdom.

When they came to the appointed spot, Philip was buried in the ground as far as to the knees ; his hands were tied behind him, and nailed to a stake. A similar pit was made for Hermes, and he was told to get into it. His poor maimed ankles were so unsteady that he could only obey by leaning heavily upon the stake. The humour of the situation struck him, and, laughing merrily, he cried, " Even here the devil cannot bear my weight." When the earth had been filled in about him, he called a Christian bystander, and adjured him to carry a last message to his son Philip, bidding him see that all moneys deposited with him were safely returned to their owners. " And say," he added, " You are young ; you must work diligently for your living, as you remember that your father did. You know that he lived an honest life with all men." Fire was then set to the faggots around the martyrs. As long as life lasted they

were heard to be giving thanks, and the word "Amen" was the last that could be distinguished. The bodies of Philip and Hermes were found scarcely marked by the fire which had suffocated them: by the orders of Justin they were thrown into the river Hebrus; but the Christians netted the river and recovered them, and buried the precious relics in a safe and beautiful place.<sup>1</sup>

The sacred books came into prominence in the persecution in the neighbouring province of Macedonia. The deacon Agathopodius of Thessalonica, and the reader Theodulus, acting in the same spirit as Philip of Heraclea and his company, stayed at the church after the suppression of the Christian assemblies, and continued to preach and to read the Bible. It was the business of Theodulus to keep the church books, and the governor demanded their surrender. Theodulus replied that he would deliver them to him as soon as the governor renounced idolatry and was ready to learn the truth from the sacred authors, but not before. After a second and a third appearance before the judge, the two men were taken out to sea and drowned.<sup>2</sup>

In the same city a little later a band of seven Christians, of whom six were women, were brought before Dulcitius the governor, charged with refusing to eat what had been offered in sacrifice to the gods. "Why," said Dulcitius to the man, Agatho, "why did you go to the sacrifice after the manner of those who are devoted, and then refuse to partake?" He answered, "Because I am a Christian." "Do you still remain in the same mind to-day?" "Certainly." The women were asked a like question in turn. "I believe in the living God," said Agape, "and I will not part with my good conscience." "Why did I not obey the emperors

<sup>1</sup> Ruinart, p. 364.

<sup>2</sup> *Acta Sanctorum*, April, vol. i. p. 42.

and Caesars?" said Irene; "for fear of God." "I believe in the living God," said Chione, "and therefore I never do such a thing." "I wish to save my soul alive," said Cassia. "Will you partake of the sacrifices?" asked Dulcitius. "Certainly not," she answered. "I say the same," was the answer of Philippa. "What do you mean by 'the same'?" the judge asked. "I would rather die than eat of your sacrifices," Philippa replied. "I also say the same," answered Eutychia; "I too would rather die." Eutychia was far advanced in pregnancy. "Have you a husband?" Dulcitius inquired. "He is dead," the woman answered. "How long has he been dead?" "Nearly seven months." "How came you to be in that condition?" "By the husband whom God gave me," replied the widow. "Eutychia," said the governor, "I earnestly advise you to withdraw from that madness, and to come back to ordinary human ways of thinking. Tell me, will you obey the imperial edict?" "I will do no such thing," she answered; "I am a Christian, a servant of Almighty God." "As Eutychia is with child," the governor said, "let her be kept in prison for the time being."

He then singled out Agape and Chione for interrogation. He asked them if they were prepared to comply with the imperial requirements, like loyal subjects. "I cannot sacrifice to Satan," said Agape; "my mind is not under his government; it is quite made up." "No one," said Chione, "can influence our minds in that direction." The governor turned suddenly to a dangerous subject. "Have you got in your possession," he asked, "any of those wicked Christian records, or parchments, or books?" "No, none, sir," answered Chione: "the present emperors have taken them all away." "Who was it," asked Dulcitius,

“that put these ideas in your heads?” “Almighty God,” she answered simply. “What people were those,” he persisted, “who prevailed upon you to take up with this folly?” “Almighty God,” she replied, “and His only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.” “It is plain to every one,” said the governor, “that all ought to be loyally obedient to our emperors and Caesars. But forasmuch as, after this length of time, and so many warnings, and the publication of so many edicts, and all the threats that have been launched at you, you are so rash and headstrong as to despise the command of our lords the emperors and Caesars, and to abide by that wicked name of Christians ; and whereas, in spite of being pressed by the heads of the police, and by the civil authorities, to make a written denial of Christ, and to do what has been ordered, you refuse even to this day to do so ; for these reasons you must receive the punishment that you deserve.” He wrote the sentence, and then read it aloud. Agape and Chione, for disloyally defying the divine edict of the emperors and Caesars, and for still clinging to the irrational and vain religion of the Christians, which is execrable in the eyes of all devoted men, were to be given over to the flames. The governor added that Agatho, and Cassia, and Philippa, and Irene, were to be detained in prison during his good pleasure, by reason of their youth.

After the martyrdom of Agape and Chione, Irene, who was sister to them both, was again examined. This time the Scriptures were the chief article in the examination. It had come to the governor’s knowledge that Irene, at least, had kept Christian writings by her instead of surrendering them. “Your conduct,” he said, “shows your obstinate madness. You have wilfully kept to the present time a whole quantity of



parchments, books, writing tablets, notes, and pages of the writings of the wicked Christians of all ages. When they were produced, you acknowledged them, although day after day you denied that they were yours. The punishment of your own sisters was not enough for you, nor had you the fear of death before your eyes. Therefore you must be punished. I think, however, that I may still without impropriety show you some mercy. If even now you will acknowledge the gods, you shall be free from punishment and from peril. Will you then do as the emperors and Caesars have commanded? Are you prepared to eat of the sacrifices to-day, and to offer to the gods?" "No," answered Irene; "I am not prepared to do so, because of God Almighty, who created heaven and earth, the sea, and all things that are therein. The supreme condemnation of everlasting torment is appointed for those who transgress the word of God." "Who was it," asked Dulcitius, on the watch for accomplices, "that suggested to you to keep those parchments and writings until now?" "It was that Almighty God," she answered, "who commanded us to love Him to the death. For that reason we did not dare to give them up, and chose rather to be burned alive, or to bear whatever else might happen to us, than to give them up." "Who was aware," urged Dulcitius, "that they were in the house where you lived?" Irene answered, "Almighty God, who knows all things, saw them, but no one besides; I call God to witness. No one, for a very good reason. We thought our own people more dangerous than enemies, and feared that they might accuse us; so we showed the books to no one." "Last year," the governor continued, "when first this edict of our lords the emperors and Caesars was published, where were you concealed?" Irene



hesitated to tell. "Where it pleased God," she said, and then added, "God knows, we were in the mountains, in the open air." "With whom were you living?" "We were in the open air," she repeated, "wandering from mountain to mountain." "Who supplied you with bread?" "God," she answered, "who giveth food to all." Then the governor asked her, "Was your father privy to all this?" "No," said Irene; "by God Almighty, he was not privy to it; he knew nothing whatsoever about it." "Which of your neighbours, then," he pursued, "knew about it?" "Ask the neighbours," replied the spirited girl, "and the places, if any one knew where we were." "When you came back from the mountains, as you say," Dulcitius continued, "did you read these writings in the presence of anybody else?" "They were in our own home," she answered, "and we did not dare to take them out. It was a great grief to us that we could not study them day and night, as we used to do from the beginning until this day last year, when we hid them."

Dulcitius pronounced sentence upon Irene. No rack or claw was used upon her, but she was submitted to a moral torture which was far worse. Her sisters, the judge said, had been quickly despatched. Irene, first for fleeing from justice, and then for hiding the Scriptures, was liable to the penalty of death; but before she died, she was to be stripped of her clothing, and exposed to the outrages of the ill-disposed, with the provision of one loaf from the governor's palace. The aediles of the city and their police officer were called in, and the governor gave them to understand that if he should receive information from his agents that Irene had been allowed to leave the place for

an instant, the severest punishment would fall upon them. The books which had been produced in court out of Irene's boxes and coffers were to be publicly burned.

The horrible sentence was carried out, but Irene came through the trial untouched and even unaccosted. Once more she was brought to the tribunal. Dulcitius asked if she persisted in her foolhardiness. She replied that it was no foolhardiness, but her duty towards God, and that she persisted in it. Dulcitius called for paper and wrote her final sentence. Like her sisters, and on the same spot as they, she was burned alive. What became of her four surviving companions is not known.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Franchi de' Cavalieri in *Studi e Testi*, vol. ix. p. 15; Ruinart, p. 348; Knopf, p. 91.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### IRENÆUS AND QUIRINUS

THE provinces along the Danube were rich in martyrdoms. Either at Dorostorum, or at Axiopolis not far from it, by the lower reaches of that river, a soldier named Dasius attained his crown during the reign of Diocletian, though the strange circumstances of his death give reason to think that it may have occurred earlier in the reign, and not as a part of the general persecution of the Church.

The feast called the Saturnalia was one of the most popular of heathen feasts, especially in the army. It was a time of chartered excess and debauch, and was eagerly looked forward to. Among the troops in Moesia a custom had crept in which seems to us incredible, and yet serious scholars have argued for the truth of it. The soldiers, a month before the festival, chose one of their number by lot to be the king of the revels. He was clothed with the insignia of an emperor and attended by a bodyguard, and for thirty days had liberty to do anything he pleased ; but at the end of the time he was expected to commit suicide, as a kind of expiatory offering to Saturn. The lot one year fell upon Dasius, who was a Christian. He refused the position assigned to him. If he was to die, he said, he preferred to make a freewill offering of himself to Christ, instead of being sacrificed to an idol.

Some time before persecution touched the civilian

world, Diocletian attempted to weed Christianity out of the army ; but it was difficult, no doubt, to do it exhaustively. Here and there a Christian would still be found in the ranks, and each case would be dealt with as it arose. The soldiers at Dorostorum, angry with Dasius for his refusal, put him under arrest, and next day denounced him to the legate, who bore the name of Bassus. Bassus, of course, was not concerned with the arrangements for the Saturnalia, but a charge of Christianity was a different matter, especially if it was accompanied by anything like insubordinate language. He ordered Dasius to make supplication to the effigies of "our lords the emperors, who give us peace and provide us with sustenance, and take thought for our welfare every day." Dasius, if we may trust the Acts, replied that he was a Christian, and as such was no soldier of an earthly sovereign, but a soldier of the heavenly King, "whose gift," he said, "I enjoy"—meaning, no doubt, the gift of the Holy Ghost—"by whose grace I live, and in whose unspeakable loving-kindness I am rich." The legate urged him again. "Pray," he said, "to the sacred images of our emperors. Even the barbarous nations revere and serve them." Again Dasius declined. "You are aware, Dasius," said Bassus, "that everyone is bound to obey the commands of the emperors and the sacred laws. I wish to be lenient with you. Answer me without anxiety or fear." "Do," he replied, "as you are commanded by those ungodly and abominable emperors. I will maintain the faith which I once for all pledged myself to my God to maintain. No threats of yours can change my purpose." Bassus offered to give him two hours to think it over. "What is the good of giving me two hours?" cried Dasius ; "I have already

told you what I think. Do what you please. I am a Christian. I despise and abhor your emperors and their glory." There was only one answer to such language. Bassus ordered him at once to be beheaded.<sup>1</sup>

Sirmium, on the Save, a little above its confluence with the Danube, was one of the main seats of empire in the time of Diocletian. The Bishop of Sirmium, at the height of the persecution, was a young man for his station. His name was Irenæus. Probus, the governor of Pannonia, summoned him, and bade him obey "the divine ordinances," and sacrifice. Irenæus replied with the words of Exodus, so often quoted in those days of strife with paganism, "He that sacrificeth unto the gods and not to God, he shall be utterly destroyed." "Our most gracious princes," said the governor, "have ordered sacrifice to be done, or torture to be applied." "My orders are to submit to torture rather than to deny God and sacrifice to devils." "Sacrifice, or I must have you tortured." "I shall rejoice if you do, that I may be found a partaker of the suffering of my Lord." The torture was severely inflicted. While it was going on, Probus said, "What do you say, Irenæus—will you sacrifice?" The bishop answered, "I am sacrificing to my God by a good confession, as I have always done."

Then took place one of those scenes in court which must have been hard to witness unmoved. His kinsfolk drew near to the tortured man, and besieged him with entreaties. His children kissed his feet and implored him to pity them. His own wife, and those of his relatives, joined in the supplication. His father and mother wept and wailed over him. His faithful ser-

<sup>1</sup> *Analecta Bollandiana*, vol. xvi. p. 11; Knopf, p. 86.



vants, his neighbours, his friends, raised their voices in lamentation, and told him that he was too young to die. But Irenaeus made no answer to any of them, good or ill. At last the governor addressed him again. "Let their tears," he said, "draw you away from your madness. Think of your youth, and sacrifice." "I think of my eternal welfare," replied Irenaeus, "when I decline to sacrifice."

Probus commanded him to be thrown into prison, where for many days great hardships were inflicted upon him. One day, in the middle of the night, Probus sent for him, and bade him sacrifice, and so save himself further troubles. "Do as you have been bidden," the young bishop answered; "you must not expect that of me." Probus was so annoyed that he ordered him to be beaten with sticks. "I have a God," Irenaeus rejoined, "whom I have learned from early years to worship. I adore Him. He comforts me in everything, and to Him I offer sacrifice; but I cannot adore gods made with hands." "Save yourself death," said the governor; "be content with the tortures which you have endured." "I save myself death in a moment," he answered, "when by means of the punishments which you inflict, and which I do not feel, for God's sake I gain eternal life." "Have you a wife?" the governor inquired. "No." "Have you any children?" "No." "Have you a father and mother?" "No." "Then who were those people weeping at the last session of the court?" Irenaeus answered, "There is a commandment of Jesus Christ, my Lord, who said, 'He that loveth father or mother, or wife or children or kinsfolk, more than Me, is not worthy of Me.'" "Sacrifice," said the governor, "if it were only for their sakes." "My children,"

answered Irenaeus, "have the same God as I have, and He can save them. You do as you are bidden." Once more the governor urged the young man to sacrifice and avoid suffering. "Do what you will," he answered; "you shall see what power of resistance to your insidious attacks the Lord Jesus Christ will give me." "I must pronounce sentence upon you," said Probus. "I shall be much obliged to you, if you will," replied the bishop. The sentence was given. "I command that Irenaeus, who refuses to obey the imperial orders, should be thrown into the river." The young bishop was a little disappointed. "I thought that I should have all those tortures that you threatened me with, and then, at the end of them, be put to the sword; but you have treated me with none of these things. Do it, I beseech you, that you may learn how Christians, through their faith in God, are schooled to despise death."

Probus gratified the bishop's wish so far as to add to his sentence the death of the sword. With thanksgiving to Christ for extending the range of his sufferings, Irenaeus was led out to one of the bridges over the Save, where he took off his garments, stretched out his hands towards heaven, and prayed, "O Lord Jesus Christ, who didst vouchsafe to suffer for the salvation of the world, let Thy heavens open that the angels may receive the spirit of Thy servant Irenaeus, who suffers thus for Thy name and for Thy people brought forth by Thy Catholic Church of Sirmium. I beseech Thee, and I entreat Thy mercy, that Thou wouldest vouchsafe both to receive me and to confirm them in Thy faith." Then the sword fell, and his body was thrown into the Save.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ruinart, p. 356; Von Gebhardt, p. 162.

This was not the first martyrdom with which Probus was concerned ; nor was it the last. Apparently not long before, a priest, named Montanus, from Singidunum, the modern Belgrade, had fled for refuge to Sirmium and fallen into the hands of Probus, who put him to death. Not long after, his official duties took him to the town of Cibalae, some fifty miles from Sirmium, afterwards the birthplace of the Christian emperor Valentinian. A Bishop of Cibalae, named Eusebius, had suffered martyrdom in the persecution of Valerian ; and on the anniversary of his glorious death, the head reader of that church was brought before Probus. The examination was as follows :—

“What is your name?” “Pollio.” “Are you a Christian?” “Yes.” “What office do you hold?” “I am the head of the readers.” “What do you mean by readers?” “Those whose duty it is to read the word of God to the congregation.” “Those who impose upon silly women, and tell them not to marry, and persuade them to adopt a fanciful chastity.” “You will be able to test our silliness and fancifulness to-day.” “How?” “The silly and fanciful people are those who forsake their Creator and consent to your superstitions. Those who have read the commandments of the eternal King, and strive to fulfil them in despite of tortures, prove themselves to be loyal and steadfast.” “What king do you mean, and what commandments?” “The good and holy commandments of our King, Christ.” “What are they?” Pollio gave an excellent summary of Christian morality. “Now what is the good of all that,” Probus answered, “if a man is killed, and sees the light no more, and loses all his corporal possessions?” “This brief light is not so good as the light eternal, and possessions

which endure are more precious than those which perish ; and it is not prudence which prefers things temporal to things eternal." "Enough of that ; do what the emperors have commanded." "What is that?" "To sacrifice." "Do what they have commanded you ; for I shall do nothing of the kind, because it is written, 'He that sacrificeth to devils and not to God shall be utterly destroyed.'" "You shall be smitten with the sword if you do not sacrifice." "Do as you have been bidden. My duty is to follow in all sincerity the footsteps of the bishops, and presbyters, and all the fathers, whose teaching I have imbibed. Anything that you may like to inflict upon me I shall gladly welcome."

The governor sentenced him to be burned. He was executed a mile from the city, blessing and glorifying God.<sup>1</sup>

The carefulness of Christians with regard to chastity, to which Probus made reference, was displayed in connexion with another martyrdom, at Sirmium, about the same time—though whether Probus was then governor of Pannonia or not is not known. There was a Greek Christian, called Syneros—or, as the name is sometimes written, Serenus—who had taken up his residence at Sirmium, where he followed the occupation of a gardener. His garden seems to have become a favourite resort of the citizens. When the persecution first reached Sirmium, Syneros thought fit to retire ; but after a time he came back and resumed his position. One day a lady, accompanied by two maids, made her appearance in his garden at an unconventional hour, and walked up and down in a manner which seemed to Syneros suspicious. He was an

<sup>1</sup> Ruinart, p. 359.

elderly man, and ventured to remonstrate with her. He told her that she had no business there, and advised her to go back to her husband's house and behave like an honest woman.

The lady's husband was an officer of the household of Galerius, and was in attendance upon the emperor at a distance. In her mortification, she wrote him an angry letter, saying how she had been insulted. Her husband obtained leave of absence from Galerius, and returned to Sirmium, where he soon brought Syneros before the governor. Upon inquiry, however, the charges brought against him by the lady fell to the ground, and the husband was convinced that his wife had been really to blame, and that Syneros had acted very properly in finding fault with her behaviour.

But the conduct of Syneros struck the governor as so unusual, that he guessed him to belong to the proscribed religion. He asked him what his nationality was. Without a moment's hesitation, Syneros, seeing what was coming, answered, "I am a Christian." The governor asked him how he had hitherto escaped the sacrificial test which had been imposed. He answered modestly, "As it seemed good to Góð to keep me hitherto in the body. I was like a stone rejected from the building ; but now the Lord has need of me for it. Now, because He would have me discovered, I am ready to suffer for His name's sake, that I may have part in His kingdom with all the saints." The governor subjected him to no tortures or indignities, but gave sentence that, for withdrawing and concealing himself in contempt of the imperial command to sacrifice, he was to be beheaded.<sup>1</sup>

A special interest attaches to the martyrdom of a

<sup>1</sup> Ruinart, p. 433.



group of sculptors in the same province, because it took place under the direction of the great emperor Diocletian himself, though probably after his abdication of sovereignty. Diocletian was a great builder, and deeply interested in everything connected with architecture and its attendant arts. He made a journey one day into the province of Pannonia, probably from the wonderful palace of Spalato, on the Adriatic coast, which he built for his old age. His object was to inspect certain newly-opened marble quarries in the mountains. There was an encampment of no fewer than 622 masons and carvers at one of these quarries, with a number of "philosophers," or more scientific workmen, over them. Amongst the men were four Christians, whose names were Claudius, Symphorian, Nicostratus, and Castorius, who were particularly successful in their work.

Diocletian expressed his wish to have an image of the Sun, in his chariot with four horses, carved out of a single block of "Thasos" stone. When one attempt had failed, and the "philosophers" were much perplexed to find another block of sufficient size, and all were busy in trying to find how the veins of the marble lay, Symphorian begged that his gang might be allowed to try. They got out a block from which they succeeded in carving a group of not less than five and twenty feet in length. Diocletian was exceedingly delighted. He rewarded the men handsomely, and proceeded to order from them a number of columns and capitals of porphyry. When they arrived at the porphyry quarry, one of the gang, called Simplicius, found that his tools broke more frequently than those of the others. They told him the reason. He was a heathen, while everything that his companions did

was done in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. At his desire they blessed his tools for him, and the result so impressed him that he asked for instruction in their religion.

When they began to look about for a priest to teach him, they found no less a personage than Cyril, the bishop of the great see of Antioch in Syria, who had now for three years worked in chains at some quarry in this distant province for his confession of the name of Christ. The four masons brought Simplicius to him one night, as he lay in irons, surrounded by other confessors, and, falling at his feet, they besought him to baptize their friend. "My son," said the bishop, "you have seen a deed of power at your work ; only believe faithfully." Simplicius asked what he was to believe. "Believe," said Cyril, "on Jesus Christ our Lord, the Son of God, who created all things ; and renounce all idols made with hands." Simplicius professed his faith, and Cyril made him a catechumen, according to the custom of the Church, and then baptized him in his place of confinement.

Emboldened by what had happened, the five men returned to their work, and began so openly to make the sign of the cross over everything that they did, that the "philosopher" under whom they worked observed it, and accused them of practising magic. Their success, and the rewards which Diocletian bestowed upon them, roused the jealousy of the philosophers, and they watched for an opportunity of getting them into trouble.

Before long the opportunity came. Diocletian ordered the five to carve him a number of Cupids and Victories out of the porphyry quarry, and, above all, an image of Asclepius, the god of health, to whom the ailing emperor had a great devotion. The men

readily obeyed his orders with regard to the Victories and Cupids, as they had formerly done with regard to the Sun in his chariot. These were but ornamental symbols. But the Asclepius was to be used for idolatrous purposes, and they intentionally left it alone. At a fixed time an exhibition of the artistic output of the last few months was held in a field, and the emperor came to inspect it. The emperor was deeply disappointed to find no Asclepius. He asked the reason. The philosophers told him that the reason was that the men were Christians, and did everything in Christ's name. They thought that Diocletian would at once punish his favoured workmen, but he only answered, "If all that they do in their Christ's name proves so fine, I see no harm in it. It does them great credit."

When the philosophers insisted, however, upon the disobedience of the five men, he sent for them. He reminded them of his past favours, and asked why they had not executed the Asclepius. Claudius replied respectfully, but said that they would never make an image of a poor human being—for it was the fashion of Christians at the time to consider the heathen gods to have been deified men—for purposes of worship. "There, sir," said the philosophers, "you hear their treason, and how haughtily they speak to you." But Diocletian reproved them for their officious interference. "I will not have my skilled workmen reviled," he said, "but encouraged."

The work was put into other hands, but when it was presented to the emperor it proved to be so inferior that he asked whether it was done by the men who had formerly given him such satisfaction. "No," the philosophers replied, and repeated their former accusations of Christianity and of magic. At last

Diocletian felt himself bound to take action, though he did it as unwillingly as he had formerly done against his Christian chamberlains at Nicomedia. He ordered a tribune to give them a fair trial, and to visit any one who bore false witness against them with the same penalty that would be due if the accusation were well founded. When called upon to worship the sun-god, the five men at once confessed themselves Christians, and were sent to prison for nine days. The next time that they appeared before the tribune, he warned them not to trifle with the favour which Diocletian had so markedly shown them. "Our gracious prince," he said, "is so kind-hearted that he treats men like brothers or sons, but especially those who worship the gods." "If he cares so much for men," Symphorian answered, "he ought to see that they do not offend God, their Creator. Our care is to avoid perishing in the world to come, where the fire is not quenched."

The tribune reported the case to Diocletian, who ordered that if they still refused, they should be beaten with scorpions. Acting on these instructions, the tribune once more offered them their choice between the friendship of the emperor and the torture. The choice was soon made. They were stripped and beaten with scorpions, while an officer of the court cried aloud, "Despise not the bidding of the princes." Finally, by Diocletian's orders, they were enclosed in lead and thrown into the river. The good bishop Cyril was so affected by the news that "he afflicted himself and passed to the Lord" in the prison.<sup>1</sup>

The Bishop of Siscia, in the same province of Pan-  
nonia, was a man named Quirinus. When he knew

<sup>1</sup> *Untersuchungen zur Römischen Kaisergeschichte*, vol. iii. pp. 3, 324.



that measures were to be taken against the Christians, he left the city to seek refuge elsewhere, but was caught and brought before the local justice, Maximus. We cannot be sure that the report of the examination is in every respect exact, as later hands have tampered with it ; but, no doubt, it reproduces in the main what passed between the two men. Maximus asked the prisoner where he was fleeing to. Quirinus replied that he was only obeying the precept, "When they persecute you in one city, flee ye into another." "Whose commandment is that?" said Maximus. "The commandment of Christ, who is true God," the bishop replied. "And do you not know," said Maximus, "that the commandments of the emperors could find you wherever you were ; and He whom you call true God can give you no help when you are caught, as you have just found when you ran away and were brought back?" Quirinus answered, "The Lord whom we serve is always with us, and wherever we are, He is able to help us. He was with me when I was caught, and He is with me here to comfort me, and it is He who answers you by my mouth." "You talk a great deal," said the magistrate, "and while you do so you put off obeying the emperors. Read their divine orders, and do as you are bidden." "I will not listen to the bidding of your emperors," the bishop answered, "because it is sacrilegious, and commands Christ's servants to sacrifice to your gods. I cannot serve them, for they are nothing. My God, whom I serve, is in heaven and earth, and in the sea and everywhere, but is higher than all, because He contains all things within Himself ; for all things were made through Him, and in Him all things consist." "You have lived too long," said Maximus, "and have picked up old wives' fables.



See, they are offering you the incense. Learn that there are gods, though you do not know them. You shall be well rewarded for your good sense if you comply; but if you will not show yourself loyal, you will have to undergo a variety of pains, and end with a horrible death." "The pains with which you threaten me I consider to be glory," said Quirinus; "and the promised death, if it is vouchsafed to me, will give eternal life. Therefore I will be loyal to my God, not to your emperors. I do not believe these gods to be gods, when they are not; and I will not put incense upon the altars of devils, because I know that my God has an altar upon which I offer sacrifices of a sweet smell, such as are suitable to Him." "I see that madness is driving you to death," said Maximus; "sacrifice to the gods." "I will not sacrifice to devils," the bishop replied; "for it is written, 'All the gods of the heathen are but devils,' and, 'Whosoever sacrificeth to gods shall be utterly destroyed.'"

Then Maximus ordered them to thrash him with sticks. While this was done, he said, "Come back to reason, and acknowledge that the gods whom the Roman empire serves are mighty gods. If you comply, you shall be made a priest of the great god Jupiter; if not, you shall be sent on to be tried by Amantius, the governor of Pannonia Prima. He will award you the death you deserve. Now, come back from your folly. Agree to do it." The bishop answered, "I am now discharging the office of priesthood. I am made a priest indeed, if I am allowed to offer my own body to the true God. As for the beating of my body, I like it; it does not hurt me. I put myself at your disposal for worse inflictions, that those whom I have governed in this life may follow me to that eternal life

which is easily reached by a road like this." Maximus ordered him to be put in heavy chains in the prison till he became sober. Quirinus replied that he had no horror of the prison : God would be with him there.

Three days after, he was conveyed in heavy chains from town to town along the Danube till he reached the governor, Amantius, at the town of Sabaria, the modern Stein-am-Anger, and famous as the birthplace of the great St. Martin, who was born almost the same year. Amantius asked him whether the report which he had received of his trial before Maximus was correct. He said that it was ; he had confessed the true God at Siscia, and that nothing could separate him from Him. Amantius courteously expressed his reluctance to lay stripes upon a man of Quirinus' age, and besought him to perform the required acts, that he might spend the rest of his days in peace. Quirinus replied that, old as he was, faith could give him a strength superior to all punishments, that he had no great desire to live, and no fear at all to die. Amantius told him that it was inhuman to court death in that fashion. Other criminals, he said, pleaded Not Guilty in order to escape death : why would not Quirinus do the same ? The bishop explained that there was no likeness between the cases ; the criminals in seeking life denied God, and died ; the Christian gains eternal life by obeying the laws of Christ.

The sentence pronounced upon him was that he should have a stone fastened round his neck and be thrown—like Irenæus at Sirmium, and like the five stone-workers in the same province—into the river. The road to Scarabantia crossed the river Sibaris on a lofty bridge, and from this the bishop was thrown. It was widely believed in Christendom a little later that

in spite of the stone hung round his neck the body of Quirinus would not sink, and that he was heard praying on the waters.<sup>1</sup>

A similar death put an end to the sufferings of the deacon Hermylus, and of his compassionate gaoler Stratonicus, who were thrown into the Danube, and after three days were washed up not far from Singidunum.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ruinart, p. 437.

<sup>2</sup> *Acta Sanctorum*, January 13.

## CHAPTER XIX

### SEBASTIAN; ALBAN; VINCENT; EULALIA

UNHAPPILY it is almost impossible to find anything historical to relate about the martyrdoms which took place at Rome and in Italy during the last and greatest persecution. That the church of the capital of the empire was not behind other cities in the number and courage of its martyrs is certain, and the famous names which they bore only make it the more sad that their deeds are lost in the fictions which were invented in their honour.

Diocletian himself visited Rome "immediately after the loss of his happiness," as Lactantius expresses it ; that is to say, directly after promulgating the edict of persecution in February 303. The main object of the visit was to celebrate his *Vicennalia*, the twentieth anniversary of his accession. That festival took place in November, but the emperor's stay perhaps began earlier in the year than has been thought by some recent authorities. He was not at all pleased with the state of things which he found there ; in particular, the way in which the public games were conducted at Rome appeared to him indecent. "I am censor," he is reported to have said ; "when I am looking on, the games ought to be of a better character."

It may be that an incident with which a Christian was concerned contributed to his displeasure. It is said that one day Diocletian was present at a panto-

mimic performance in Rome, where the player made it his business to take off the ways of the obnoxious religion. Lying on the stage as if he were very ill, he called loudly for baptism. "I feel so heavy," he said; "I want to be made light." "How is that to be done?" asked the other performers; "do you think that we are carpenters, and are going to plane you?" "Fools," cried Genesius, for that was the chief player's name, "I wish to die a Christian." "What for?" they asked. "That I may find refuge in God in that day," was the answer.

Great laughter, of course, followed this presentment of the unfamiliar Christian phrases. A presbyter and an exorcist were introduced upon the stage, and sat down by the sick man's bedside. "Why have you sent for us, my son?" the mock-priest inquired. But Genesius had Christian friends and relations, perhaps even Christian parents. His use of Christian language was based upon some real acquaintance with the faith and its solemnities. According to the story, at the moment when he was to undergo the sacred rite in mockery, his heart misgave him. Grace, which had been spurned before, appealed again to his better self; and he answered with a more serious meaning than he had intended, "I desire to receive the grace of Christ, that I may be born again, and set free from the iniquities which have been my ruin." The actors clothed him in white garments. The fun of the piece, however, was that directly the sick man was baptized, he was called upon, in the play, to pay the penalty of his new faith in a way that he had not expected. Soldiers followed the priest, and he was carried off to answer for his religion before the judge. Genesius seized the dramatic moment, and turned it into a



reality. Addressing the great emperor himself, he declared how he had always hated and insulted the Christian name, but that his mind was changed, and he now exhorted Diocletian and all who heard him to follow him in the change.

The affront was too great to be borne quietly. Diocletian commanded him to be beaten and delivered over to Plautian, the prefect, to see that he did sacrifice. He was hung on the hobby horse, and had his sides torn; lighted torches were applied to him; but he would not go back from the confession which he had made. At last he was beheaded, expressing the liveliest penitence for having held up the holy name of Christ to ridicule, and for having turned too late to the service of the true King.<sup>1</sup>

Not inconceivably, this may also have been the time at which a more celebrated martyrdom took place. If it is true that Sebastian was condemned by Diocletian in person, the choice lies between this time and the year before, when Diocletian and Maximian celebrated a triumph at Rome; for on no other occasion is Diocletian known to have visited the city. Sebastian was a native of southern Gaul, and brought up at Milan. He entered the army, and rose to command one of the cohorts of the Praetorian Guard. In that position he is said to have endeared himself greatly to his imperial masters. But when the Christian troubles began, Sebastian was unwearied in his endeavours to fortify those who were in danger of compromising their Christian faith. He took part in burying the bodies of other Christian soldiers who died for their religion. He came to be regarded as the protector of the Church.

<sup>1</sup> Ruinart, p. 236.

For such actions as these he was denounced to Diocletian. The story goes that Diocletian upbraided him for secretly practising a religion derogatory to the gods and injurious to the emperor in the very household of the emperor, who had been so kind to him. Sebastian answered that he had always prayed to Christ for the emperor, and had interceded for the welfare of the Roman world with the God who is in heaven, thinking that it was a foolish thing to seek help from images of stone. Diocletian thereupon commanded him to be taken out into the Campagna, and tied up, and shot with arrows. A company of archers made him their target, "until," as the story says, "his body bristled with the arrows like a hedgehog." The injuries, nevertheless, were not fatal. A woman, who came to do the last offices for the body, found him still breathing. She nursed him, and he recovered enough to present himself one day to Diocletian "on the steps of Elagabalus." Diocletian, in surprise, asked if it was indeed Sebastian. "Yes," he replied; "the Lord Jesus Christ has brought me back to life that I might meet you and testify that this persecution of yours against His servants is wholly undeserved." He was then taken to the basement of the palace, and beaten till he died, and his body was thrown into the great sewer.<sup>1</sup>

A whole series of Roman martyrdoms are woven into the legend of St. Sebastian. Probably they have no historical connexion with that saint, and took place at a later point than his; but there is no reason to doubt the reality of the martyrdoms, or of some parts of the story concerning them. A woman named Zoe was arrested for praying at the tomb of St.

<sup>1</sup> *Acta Sanctorum*, January 20.

Peter on the festival of St. Peter and St. Paul, and taken before an officer called the patron of the district of the Naumachia, in which St. Peter's stood. Upon her refusal to offer incense to a little statue of Mars with which his office was furnished, he committed her for five days to a dark dungeon, where she was nearly starved to death. Her spirit, however, was unbroken, and she was heard solacing herself by singing hymns to God. At the end of the five days, the prefect of the city had her hung up to a tree and a filthy smoke sent up in her face. Zoe died at the first breath of it, and her body was thrown into the Tiber. A man called Tiburtius was betrayed by an apostate Christian. He was of good family. "Restore yourself to your proper rank," said the prefect, "and be what nature meant you for." Tiburtius refused to comply. Fire was applied to him, but he professed not to feel it. The prefect remarked that it was well known that Christ had taught His followers magic. "Be silent, wretch!" cried the indignant martyr; "do not let me hear you name that sweet and holy name." The prefect gave sentence upon him. "Let the blasphemer of the gods be punished with the sword." The sentence was executed three miles out of the city on the Labican road, where a Christian relative contrived to bury him. Castulus perished a little further out along the same road. He was a *diaetarius* (as it was called) of the imperial house; that is, he had the charge of certain apartments in it. He is said to have been active in protecting his fellow Christians, among them Gaius the Bishop of Rome, at the time when Diocletian first came to the purple. It had been a moment of great distress for them. In the

confusion of the civil war which placed Diocletian in power, the Roman authorities would allow nothing to be bought or sold in the markets without buyer and seller offering incense before the little images which were everywhere set up. Officers were stationed in the street, and by the fountains, whose business it was to see that no one even drew water without pouring some of it out in honour of the idols. Castulus in those days found shelter for some of his brethren within the imperial palace itself, yet he survived to exhibit his faith again in the great persecution twenty years later. Thrice he was tortured and stood firm. At length, whether by judicial sentence or by the caprice of underlings is uncertain, he was pushed into a ditch by the roadside, and buried under a mass of sand. Two brothers, Marcus and Marcellian, were nailed to one stake. It is said that the prefect offered to unfasten them if they would do the idolatrous act, and that they answered that they were very well-off where they were; for the first time, they said, they were sure of abiding in the love of Christ; the nails held them fast to it.<sup>1</sup>

Two martyrs, Marcellinus and Peter, whose names have found a place in the canon of the Roman Mass, were respectively priest and exorcist. It appears that they were arrested as they came out of a catacomb on the Aurelian road, where Marcellinus had celebrated the Eucharist. The soldiers who arrested them were, at the very moment, conveying out to execution a man called Artemius, with his wife and daughter. They beheaded Artemius on the spot, and threw the wife and daughter down the shaft of the catacomb, and hurled stones upon them as they lay at the

<sup>1</sup> *Acta Sanctorum*, January 20.



bottom. Marcellinus and Peter were taken to a place known as the Black Wood, though the Christians of Rome called it the White Wood in their honour, and there beheaded. Damasus, the celebrated Bishop of Rome, put an inscription upon their grave, in which he says that, when he was a boy, the executioner who had beheaded them told him some circumstances of their death. He received orders to behead and bury them in a deep thicket, that the Christians might not discover where they were laid ; and when they reached the spot, the two saints cheerfully busied themselves in clearing away the bushes, that they might have room to die.<sup>1</sup>

The story of St. Agnes has come down to us by the hands of several ancient writers, besides the late and worthless "Acts ;" but when the accounts of St. Ambrose, of Damasus, and of Prudentius are compared, there is little that can be considered historical in any of them. St. Ambrose in his prose works tells the story differently from the way he does it in his hymn for St. Agnes' day. It is not even certain that Agnes suffered in the last great persecution, or whether it was not fifty years earlier, under Decius or Valerian. So far as the facts can be ascertained, they are as follows :

Agnes, at the time of her death, was only about twelve or thirteen years of age. It seems that, like a famous young Spanish maiden of whom we must speak by and by, she was confined to the house by her anxious parents, who feared that she would offer herself for the honours of martyrdom. She contrived notwithstanding to escape, and came before the judge. According to the imaginary account of the scene given by St. Ambrose,

<sup>1</sup> *Acta Sanctorum*, June 2.



the judge endeavoured by turns to frighten and to cajole her into sacrificing. He reminded her—it is a common feature in the narratives of virgin martyrs—how many young men would think her a desirable match. She answered that it would be doing a wrong to her Spouse to look for some other whom she might like, and that none should have her but He who had first chosen her. Prudentius, probably through misunderstanding an expression of St. Ambrose, says that Agnes was exposed to shame and outrage, like many of the female martyrs of the time, but protected by a divine miracle ; and later writers have followed his story, and enlarged upon it. The earlier writers knew nothing of this part of the story. St. Ambrose in his hymn relates that when the judge called upon her to put the torch to the incense upon the idol altar, she said that these were not the torches for the virgins of Christ, thinking, no doubt, of the torches that were used at a wedding. Both St. Ambrose and Damasus relate that when she was to die she took pains at the last moment, like St. Perpetua in older days, to cover herself well with her garment, or with her flowing hair, “that no mortal eye might look upon the temple of the Lord.” St. Ambrose pictures her as dying by the sword, Damasus as being burnt alive.<sup>1</sup>

A lady of St. Ambrose’s own family left behind her a reputation which he uses more than once to enforce the lesson of chaste unworldliness. Her name was Soteris. The family was one of great distinction, and Soteris was a maiden of remarkable beauty. She was called upon to sacrifice, and refused. Then the judge bade his attendants to slap her in the face. He thought that if he treated her like a saucy slave-girl she might be brought to a sense of what became her position.

<sup>1</sup> Franchi de’ Cavalieri, *S. Agnese nella tradizione e nella leggenda.*

When Soteris heard the order, she removed the veil which hung over her head, and offered her cheek to the rude hands of the executioners. Other maidens might have shrunk not only from the pain and from the shame, but also from the loss of their good looks ; Soteris welcomed the loss of what was, after all, a perilous gift. The beating was unmercifully administered, but without changing the girl's mind, and finally, as St. Ambrose says, " she found the sword that she was seeking." <sup>1</sup>

There was a Christian lady at Rome, whose name, according to Rufinus, was Sophronia. She was the wife of no less a person, Eusebius tells us, than the prefect of Rome. Maxentius, the son of the emperor Maximian, set his unhallowed desire upon her, and, instead of threatening her with the shameful exposure so often employed upon Christian women, sent agents to convey her to his palace. The cowardly husband was afraid to resist. But Sophronia, if that was her name, asked to be allowed to retire for a few minutes to her own apartment, as if to put on suitable apparel. When she found herself alone, like the Lucretia of ancient Roman history, she drove a sword into her body and died. Eusebius, in his enthusiasm, declares her to have been the noblest of all the female sufferers of the time ; but such suicide was not approved by the Western Church in general, and probably that is the reason why the woman does not appear in the lists of the acknowledged martyrs of Christendom.<sup>2</sup>

If the Acts of the Roman martyrs are in general untrustworthy, there are a few from other parts of Italy which bear every mark of truth. Of such a character are the Acts of St. Euplus.

<sup>1</sup> Ambrose, *de Exhort. Virg.* 12 ; *de Virg.* iii. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* viii. 14.

The governor of Sicily, Calvisianus, was sitting in his private office at Catania, on the 12th of August in the year 304, or perhaps more probably 303, when a voice was heard outside the curtain which screened the office from the court, crying "I am a Christian, and for the name of Christ I desire to die." The governor ordered the speaker to be brought in. It was a deacon of the name of Euplus, or Euplius. He was carrying a manuscript of the Gospels. A friend of Calvisianus, perhaps a member of his council, exclaimed that the man ought not to keep papers of that kind, contrary to the imperial command. "Where did these come from?" asked the governor; "out of your own home?" "I have no home," Euplus replied, "as my Lord Jesus Christ knows." Doubtless, like Agape and her sisters at Thessalonica, he had taken to the hills in order to be able to read the Gospels in peace. "Was it you who brought them hither?" Calvisianus asked. "Yes, I brought them with my own hands, as you see," was the answer; "they found me with them." A curious impulse came over the judge. "Read them," he said. Euplus opened the book and read, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Then he turned over the pages, and read again, "Whosoever will come after Me, let him take up his cross and follow Me." He was proceeding to read other texts, when Calvisianus said, "What does this mean?" "It is the law of my Lord," said Euplus, "which was delivered to me." Calvisianus thought that accomplices might be within reach, and asked who it was that had delivered the laws to Euplus. He answered, "It was Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God." Calvisianus saw no advantage in prosecuting the informal inquiry any further. "Since he has openly

confessed," he said, "let him be examined by torture ; let him be given over to the torturers."

The formal trial began the same day. Euplus lay ready for torture. Calvisianus said to him, "With regard to the confession which you made to-day, what have you to say now?" Euplus had one hand free, and, making the sign of the cross with it upon his forehead, he answered, "What I said then, I confess still. namely, that I am a Christian, and that I read the divine Scriptures." "Why," said Calvisianus, "did you keep these writings beside you, and not give them up, when the emperors forbade them?" Euplus answered, "Because I am a Christian, and it was not right for me to give them up. It is better for me to die than to give them up. In these is eternal life. The man who gives them up, loses eternal life. I give my life that I may not lose it."

Upon Calvisianus' order, the torturers went to work. While they were at it, the deacon cried, "Thanks be to Thee, O Christ. Keep me, for it is for Thee that I suffer these things." The judge said to him, "Desist from this madness, Euplus ; worship the gods and you shall be set free." "I worship Christ," he answered ; "I detest the devils. Do what you please ; I am a Christian. I have long wished for this. Do what you please. Add fresh tortures ; I am a Christian." After a considerable time, the torturers were bidden to pause for a while. "Wretched man," said the judge, "worship the gods. Do reverence to Mars, Apollo, Aesculapius." "I worship the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost," the man answered : "I worship the Holy Trinity, beside whom there is no God. 'The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, let them perish.'" Calvisianus



said, "Sacrifice, if you wish to be set at liberty." Euplus answered, "I am now sacrificing, and sacrificing myself, to Christ, my God. There is nothing else that I can do. Your endeavours are in vain. I am a Christian." The governor gave orders to torture him again, and worse than before. Euplus, under the torture, cried out again, "Thanks be to Thee, O Christ. O Christ, help ! It is for Thee that I suffer these things, O Christ." The cry was repeated over and over again, so long as the sufferer had strength to speak ; and when the strength failed him, his lips were seen to move, forming noiselessly the same or similar words.

Calvisianus then withdrew into his office behind the curtain, dictated his sentence, and came out again, carrying the tablet in his hand. He read it aloud. "I order the Christian Euplus, who despises the edicts of the princes, blasphemes the gods, and refuses to return to a better mind, to be executed with the sword. Take him away." Then the Gospel, which he had when he was arrested, was hung about his neck, and he was led out, the crier proclaiming, "The Christian Euplus, the enemy of the gods and of the emperors." Euplus was very happy, and kept repeating, "Thanks be to Christ, my God." When the place of execution was reached, he knelt down and prayed at some length ; then, with renewed thanksgivings, he offered his neck to the sword and was beheaded.<sup>1</sup>

At Bologna took place—probably at this time—two martyrdoms, of which St. Ambrose speaks, though evidently he knew but little of the circumstances. Vitalis was the slave of Agricola, and seems to have owed to him his Christian faith. Agricola was a man of gentle and kindly ways, and had acquired great popularity,

<sup>1</sup> Ruinart, p. 361 ; Knopf, p. 97.



even among the enemies of his religion. They were loth to enforce the edicts against him, but hoped that he might be alarmed and abjure his Christianity, if the hand of the law were laid upon his household. Vitalis was seized, tortured, and put to death. But his martyrdom only served to prepare his master for a like end, which followed, not long after, by crucifixion. The Christian cemetery at Bologna was closed, but the bodies of the martyrs found a resting-place in the cemetery of the Jews, who, if St. Ambrose was rightly informed, eagerly offered this hospitality to the dead bodies of men whose courage they admired, without sharing their belief. St. Ambrose was himself present when the bodies were taken from their first graves, amidst the respectful sympathy of the Jews of Bologna, and carried to a more distinguished place of burial. The Christians of the place made him a present of the cross on which Agricola died, and of the nails—a great number of them, he says—with which he was fastened to it ; and St. Ambrose in turn made a present of them to the church at Florence, built to receive them by a lady named Juliana, at the dedication of which he preached the sermon in which he gives his account of the martyrdom.<sup>1</sup>

A series of pictures in the church at Chalcedon recorded the history of St. Euphemia ; a picture in the church at Imola told how St. Cassian died. Prudentius, the Spanish poet of the fifth century, relates that on his pilgrimage to Rome he was lying prostrate at the tomb of Cassian, when, raising his head, he saw on the wall facing him the representation of a horrible scene. A man was in course of being pricked to death by a mob of children. The

<sup>1</sup> Ambrose, *de Exhort. Virg.* I, 2 ; Ruinart, p. 409.

guardian of the church drew near and explained the picture to him. His tale is not one of the most likely, but things as strange have happened in the history of the world. Cassian was a schoolmaster and a Christian. When the persecution broke out, Cassian refused to comply with the order to sacrifice, and opened his school as usual. The magistrate sent and arrested him in the midst of his pupils. It was a time when atrocious forms of execution were sought for ; and the magistrate conceived the idea of giving him over to the boys to do their worst upon him. Prudentius thought that boys must always hate the schoolmaster : Cassian, at any rate, seems not to have endeared himself to those whom he taught. School exercises were written in those days upon waxen tablets, with a sharp-pointed stiletto. It was a formidable weapon, and this was neither the first nor the last time in history that it was used for murderous purposes. The boys of Imola plied their stilettos with all their might, and at last the unfortunate Cassian died, exhausted by innumerable little wounds.<sup>1</sup>

Gaul and Britain were under the direct government of Constantius, the father of the future emperor, Constantine. He was a humane prince, and had no sympathy with the persecution of the Christians. Though not a Christian himself, he gave as much protection as he could to the oppressed religion. He allowed the churches in his dominions to be destroyed, but, as Lactantius says, he preserved from outrage the true temples of God, which are human beings. Yet some martyrdoms appear to have taken place in Gaul, in spite of Constantius ; and the first martyrdom in Britain of which we have any detailed account is

<sup>1</sup> Prudentius, *περὶ Στεφ.* ix.

generally attributed to this persecution, though it might be placed earlier.

Alban is usually supposed to have been a soldier, but the fact is not stated by our only authorities. He was still a heathen when the edicts of persecution were published ; but one day a Christian priest, or clerk, flying from the law, came to his cottage, and Alban kindly gave him shelter. He saw his guest engaged day and night in prayer. The sight drew him to inquire, and, under the instruction which was given him, Alban determined to give up idolatry and accepted the Christian faith. After some days it came to the ears of the governor that the man whom his agents were seeking was hidden in Alban's house. Soldiers were sent to the place. On the threshold Alban met them, dressed in the long garment of his clerical friend, and was led away to the judge, under the supposition that he was the priest himself.

At the moment when Alban was brought in, the judge was at the altar offering sacrifice. It was soon discovered that they had got the wrong man, and the judge told Alban that because he had harboured a traitor, instead of delivering him up to justice, he must suffer the same punishment as the other would have suffered, unless he would conform to the established religion. Alban, who had deliberately put himself in the hands of the persecutors of Christianity, was not likely to be terrified by those threats. He refused to obey the command to sacrifice. The judge asked him of his origin and his family. "What does it matter to you," answered the prisoner, "what family I belong to? I am a Christian, and will do a Christian's duty." When asked his name, he replied, "My relations call me Alban, and I worship and adore the true and living

God, who created all things." "If you wish to live and be happy," said the judge, "make haste and sacrifice to the great gods." "These sacrifices," he answered, "which you offer to devils, do no good to their devotees, and can never fulfil their desires and their prayers: those who offer them only get the eternal pains of hell for their reward."

The judge ordered him to be beaten. He bore it with fortitude and cheerfulness, and, as he was no more minded to obey at the end of the beating than at the beginning, the judge pronounced sentence that he should be beheaded. So far the story runs plainly and soberly along; but here it breaks into a series of miracles. The stream that ran below Verulam stops while the martyr goes over; the executioner seeing it, embraces the martyr's faith, and is put to death with him; the martyr, arriving at the top of the hill where he is to die, prays for water, and a spring starts up at his feet. Bede relates it all without hesitation. He is at any rate justified in praising the beautiful situation of St. Albans, and there is no reason to doubt his statement that the martyrdom occurred on June 22. Our modern observance of June 17 is derived from an accidental error.<sup>1</sup>

The bloodthirsty Maximian himself, in all probability, had Spain as well as Africa under his jurisdiction, and a large contingent of Spanish martyrs was the result. Among all the towns of Spain none held its head more proudly in the following century than Caesaraugusta, or Saragossa. The poet Prudentius was a native or inhabitant of the place, and dwells with fervour upon the fact that while Cordova, Tarragona, Calahorra, Barcelona, Alcalá, could only boast of two or three

<sup>1</sup> Bede, *Hist. Gent. Angl.* i. 7.



martyrs each, and none of them of more than five, Saragossa had no fewer than eighteen. Scarcely Carthage or imperial Rome, he says, could beat that number. Of their trials and exploits, however, Prudentius knew, or has recorded, no details. About one virgin confessor of Saragossa he was better informed. Her name was Encratis. From the poet's description of her as a *violenta virgo*, it may be understood that Encratis, like a still more celebrated Spanish martyr, showed her abhorrence of idolatry by some bold and forcible action. She endured tortures almost too horrible to be related. Besides the gashings and scrapings which were usual at the time, her left breast was cut off, and the claws entered so deeply into her body that even a part of her liver was torn away. Prudentius mentions that he had seen the dreadful relic preserved by the church of Saragossa. The persecuting magistrate refused to have her put out of pain. She was thrust with her festering wounds into prison ; and such was her vitality that she seems to have survived the persecution, and, as Prudentius says, to have gained for her dwelling-place the unusual distinction of providing a home and shrine for a still living martyr. Two other Christians of the place, Gaius and Crementius, likewise "had a taste of martyrdom" without being put to death.<sup>1</sup>

From the language of Prudentius, it is uncertain whether Encratis suffered in the persecution of Diocletian or at some earlier date. The eighteen must have suffered earlier, because Prudentius seems to say that the knowledge of their history influenced in boyhood a fellow-citizen of theirs, who rose in the last persecution to be one of the most celebrated martyrs of any age or country.

<sup>1</sup> Prudentius, *περὶ Στεφ.* iv.



Vincent was born of a distinguished family. His grandfather, Agressus, had been decorated with the rank of consul. In his boyhood he was a diligent student, and under the care of the Bishop of Saragossa he attained a great reputation for learning, both secular and religious. The bishop's name was Valerius. He belonged, as Prudentius says, to "a mitred house" which gave more than one early bishop to the see of Saragossa. Valerius advanced the young Vincent to be the head of the deacons of his diocese; and, as he himself laboured under an impediment in his speech, he delegated the duty of teaching to Vincent, as another Valerius did later on, at Hippo, to St. Augustine.

The persecution in Spain was entrusted by Maximian to an officer named Datian, who left behind him a terrible remembrance among the Christians of the peninsula. To him Valerius and his deacon were brought. They confessed what they were, and Datian, hoping to break their spirits by delay and weariness, dragged them off in chains to Valencia, and there threw them into prison. They saw no one; they were barely kept from starvation; the irons with which their necks and arms were loaded nearly crushed them. Yet when they were called again to the bar, the judge was astonished and disappointed to see how well-liking they were. He addressed them, nevertheless, in kindly-sounding words, and urged them to comply with the law. The meek Valerius placed his defence in the hands of his deacon, who expressed to Datian, in eloquent terms, the Christian view of idolatry. Datian did nothing worse to the bishop than to sentence him to exile. He gave orders to submit Vincent to torture.

Vincent was put on the horse, and those tortures were applied which were commonly used to extract a

confession from criminals. The martyr only answered his judge's questions by saying that he had got what he wanted. His wishes were more than satisfied. God's servant was prepared for all. It is said that Datian became so excited that he laid about him with a rod upon the ministers of punishment, to hasten them in their work. "You are yourself avenging me," cried the deacon, "with your own hands." Datian demanded of him, according to Prudentius, the surrender of the sacred books upon which so much of this persecution turned ; but Vincent only warned him that the word of God, which they contain, is guarded by a fiery sword which will consume its enemies. The torture went on with renewed energy. It became a direct personal conflict between will and will—the will of the judge to make Vincent yield, the will of the Christian to show what Christian fortitude could endure. At last Datian said that, as lesser punishments had failed, he should proceed to real tortures. The same kind of instrument was prepared for Vincent which had served his brother deacon, Lawrence, at Rome. An iron bed was produced, and hot coals put under it, and the martyr was stretched upon the hot bars, or rather laid himself down upon them. Hot plates of iron, besides, were pressed into his flesh. Salt was sprinkled upon the burnt parts ; and when his body presented no fresh surface for a wound or burn, they began again upon the old places.

Even this appalling treatment could neither bring Vincent to submission, nor kill him. By Datian's orders he was taken to a dreadful dungeon, which was reached by no ray of daylight. There he was placed in the stocks, with his feet as far apart as they would go ; and to make matters worse the ground was

strewn with broken potsherds, so that whichever way the poor torn body turned for relief, it might find another wound reopened. Datian gave orders that no one was to be left near the sufferer, so that he might not have the solace of even a gaoler's companionship. The belief of the following century was that the dungeon was illuminated by heavenly light, and its solitude filled with comforting angels, while flowers covered the cruel ground. This legend probably takes a spiritual truth and makes it material, and in so doing it robs the martyr of the glory of his fortitude. Whatever inward consolations were vouchsafed to him, it is most likely that his outward sufferings went unrelieved.

After a time, however, Datian, learning that Vincent's mind was unchanged, thought to change it by a gentler method of treatment. The deacon was brought out of the dungeon. He was placed in the comforts of the *libera custodia*—surveillance without constraint. His fellow Christians visited him without being molested. It is probable that his liberation took place before the edict of 304, which made the persecution general. They vied with one another both to heal the mangled body and to carry away from it handkerchiefs moistened with his blood, to keep as precious treasures. But the cruel kindness of Datian was defeated. "While he was vainly thinking over future punishments," says the ancient writer, "Christ made His own disposals for the reward." Vincent scarcely felt the ease of his altered circumstances. Too great a strain had been placed upon his bodily frame, and he died peacefully in the bed where they had laid him.

The judge, baulked of his conquest, determined that the Christians should at least not make religious use of the martyr's body, and ordered it to be cast to the

birds and beasts. No beast, no bird, attacked it. It was believed that a great raven mounted guard over the corpse, and would not allow any other creature to touch it. Datian next tried throwing it into the sea in a sack, the way in which parricides were treated by Roman justice. But, as in many other cases, the body was found by Christians on the beach, and buried in a little church which had escaped destruction. After the great peace it was translated to a more sumptuous resting-place outside the walls of Valencia; and Prudentius describes the impassioned scenes which in his time took place around the tomb. A more subtle and a more effective revenge upon the martyr was taken by Datian, when he ordered that no official record of his trial should be kept. The existing "Passion" of St. Vincent was composed within the century after his death, from the traditions of those who had witnessed the events, and was read aloud in the churches of Africa in the time of St. Augustine on St. Vincent's Day.<sup>1</sup>

A French scholar has well remarked that if Spain had a Lawrence in Vincent, she had also an Agnes in Eulalia. Our knowledge of her history is derived from Prudentius, who devoted a long poem to the subject.

According to him, Eulalia was of a good family at Emerita, now Merida, on the Guadiana. Like Agnes, she had reached the age of twelve years; like Agnes, she had formed her resolution to be the bride of none other but her Saviour. When the persecution swept over Lusitania, her parents, like those of Agnes, fearing the possible effects upon her enthusiastic temper, put her in safe keeping in the country. Like Agnes, she

<sup>1</sup> Ruinart, 323; Prudentius, *περὶ Στεφ.* v.



unbolted the door one night while the household was asleep, and ran away to the town.

When the morning came, she took her stand at the tribunal where Datian, if it was he, sat surrounded by his lictors with their formidable fasces. She boldly declared herself a Christian, and took the judge and his superiors to task for declaring war upon the faith. As usual, the judge began by attempting to make the girl think how young she was, and how life with all its attractive prospects was just opening before her. Then he sought to frighten her with threats of torture, sword, wild beasts, and fire. If he did not actually use the words which the poet puts in his mouth, they no doubt represent the argument which he would use: "What trouble will it cost you to escape all this? If you will be so good as to touch a grain of salt, a pinch of incense, with the tips of your fingers, away goes the punishment." Unless the bad taste of the poet belies the behaviour of the young saint, the only answer which Eulalia gave was to spit in the judge's face, and, with a cry of detestation, to dash to the ground the images that stood on the little altar of the court, and to trample upon the incense.

The executioners began to ply their tools upon her. Eulalia read the meaning of the marks which they made upon her sides—"Lord, they are writing that Thou art mine!" They went on to put the torch to her sides, to her veil of flowing hair, to her face. She had doubtless heard how other martyrs had drawn death to them at the stake, for when the flame came near her lips, she opened her mouth and sucked it in and died. Prudentius describes how her soul took its flight in the shape of a snow-white dove. It was the 10th of December when she died; and as her body lay under the open



sky, a heavy fall of snow covered the town and the market place, and covered the girl with a soft clean pall, so that she needed no shroud from human hands.

A noble church in the time of Prudentius stood over the burying-place of Eulalia, rich with Spanish and foreign marbles, with gilding and with mosaics. He calls upon those of Eulalia's time of life to join him in doing her honour on her festival. "Gather purple violets and blood-red crocus: they are to be had, for winter here is mild, and the thawing ice unbinds the fields to fill your baskets with flowers. Girls and boys, bring presents of them, and foliage around them, while I in the middle weave my garland of verses—poor, fading garland, but still holiday-like."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Prudentius, *περὶ Στεφ.* iii.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE AFRICAN MARTYRS

THE enthusiastic temperament of the people of North Africa was the very stuff of which martyrs are made. The number of deaths in that region for the name of Christ was greater than in any other, considering that the persecution of Diocletian in the western world lasted a shorter time than in the eastern; and the records of the people's faith and courage are hardly less stirring than in the days of Perpetua or of Cyprian.

When the emperor Maximian went into that part of the empire, in the year 297, to subdue an insurrection of those who were known as the Five Tribes, there was a Christian named Typasius living near the town of Sitifi. He had served honourably in the army, and when his time of active service was over, lived a life of retirement, but liable to be called upon to serve again in an emergency as a "veteran," or a kind of reservist. The emergency had now arisen, and Typasius was summoned once more to the standard. Before the fighting began, Maximian wished to encourage his troops by giving them a present all round. Typasius, when his turn came, respectfully refused to take the gold piece from the emperor's hand, and begged to be discharged for the service of Christ. This was six years before the penal enactments against Christianity were issued, and Maximian for some reason gave him his discharge. It was afterwards believed that the reason

was that he had prophesied victories for the emperors, and that the prophecy came true.

Typasius went home rejoicing to think that he had done with military life, and built himself a hermit's cell upon his own property, and lived in it. After five or six years the edict of persecution came to Africa, and at the same time the reserve was again called out. The agents whose business it was to find them out came to Typasius in his cell, and made him come with them, in spite of his protests, to the officer commanding the district, carrying with them also the belt, the shield, and the lances, which Typasius kept hung on the wall.

When Claudius, the *dux*, or general in command, saw him, he asked why they had brought him "in that mourning garb." They told him the man's history, and added that he had refused to take service again, saying that he was a Christian and that he could not perform the required sacrifice. Claudius began to examine him. "What is your name and occupation?" "Typasius; I am a veteran. Once I served the world, but now I serve Christ only." "Why do you wear black?" "This is not black; it is white. Christians put on sackcloth in order to gain forgiveness of sins; for it is written, 'Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.'" "Have done with that nonsense; obey the commands of the emperors, and come back to the victorious standards." "No one returns to battle after victory. I have overcome the world, and have enlisted among the servants of Christ. I am Christ's soldier and Christ's servant, and if you choose to be hard on me, for Christ's sake I can bear it." "You know that deserters are liable to be made to fight the wild beasts?" "I am not a deserter. All my fellow-citizens know that I served without ever being reprov'd. I received

my honourable discharge from the emperor Maximian, with his good wishes." "You are not set free from the emperor's laws. He can alter them as he pleases. He gave you your honourable discharge, you tell me; now, with the sanction of the oracle, he orders you, like the rest of the veterans, to return to the service." "I am Christ's soldier; I cannot be yours." "Sacrifice to the gods." "I offer to Christ the sacrifice of praise; His praise shall ever be in my mouth. I do not worship images of stone and wood." "You must be desperate to despise the orders of both our emperors. Do as they have bidden, and come back to the service, or your death will serve as a warning to other deserters." "I have already told you, I am Christ's soldier; I cannot return to the life of the world." "Not another word. Put the belt on him, and the weapons in his hand."

The man was put under arrest, and for some time was compelled to follow Claudius about from station to station. The general was evidently inclined to take little notice of his religious scruples, and to lay stress only upon his military misconduct. But Typasius' fellow-soldiers, instigated by the two subordinate officers who had dragged him out of his cell, were not so complaisant. One day when Claudius came on parade he found quite an uproar among the men. They were all offering incense, and Typasius had refused. Claudius could not resist the pressure brought to bear upon him. He sent for Typasius, and commanded him to sacrifice on pain of losing his life. He refused. He said that Christ was his life, and to die was his gain. Claudius at length gave sentence upon him, reading it as usual from what he had written. The word Christian did not occur in the sentence. "I have long borne with Typasius the veteran, in hopes that he would return to

the service and offer sacrifice to the gods of Rome. When he persistently refused, I laid aside the strictness of a judge and exhorted him not to destroy himself. But forasmuch as he has stuck to that superstitious perversity, and has despised the commands of our Augusti, it is my pleasure that he should be punished with the sword, that by his death all may learn to obey the decrees of the emperors." Typasius lifted his eyes to heaven and said, "I thank Thee, O Lord Jesus Christ, who hast vouchsafed to deliver me, Thy servant, from this world."

The soldiers led him out of the city—apparently it was Tigava in Mauretania—and beheaded him. He was buried where he fell. His comrades paid him the honour of placing his shield upon the tomb; and the document which relates the story—a document only lately recovered from oblivion—says how Christian visitors used to break little fragments from the shield, and take them away to work cures upon the sick.<sup>1</sup>

Another soldier suffered a like death at Caesarea, the capital of the same province. His name was Fabius. He was the standard-bearer of the cohort which formed the governor's guard. On the arrival of the great persecuting edict—probably that of 304—the governor went in solemn procession to sacrifice. His lictors went before him, and he was attended by the whole council of the province. Criers summoned the people to the function. When Fabius was bidden to carry the standard in the procession, he refused. He said he was a Christian. The refusal was reported to the governor. The governor pretended that it was an unpremeditated act, which he would not punish at once, and put the young man under arrest for some

<sup>1</sup> *Analecta Boll.* ix. 116.



days. On his next appearance before the governor, Fabius was questioned once again, and gave the same constant reply. The governor made short work with him. He was beheaded. But the governor was anxious not "to provide the Christians with a martyr," and, after the remains had been guarded night and day for some time, he had them sewn up in two separate bags and thrown into the sea. The relics came ashore at Cartenna, forty or fifty miles to the west of Caesarea, and there were bitter contentions afterwards between the Christians of the two places, whether the martyr's head and body belonged by rights to the city where he was killed or to the city to which Providence had allowed his relics to be wafted.<sup>1</sup>

The Christian women and girls of North Africa were not behind the men in constancy and courage. Anulinus, the proconsul of Africa, came one day to the city of Thuburbo and despatched two officers to summon to his presence all the Christians of the place to do sacrifice on an imperial estate which lay near at hand. It was nine o'clock in the morning when he took his seat, with a large crowd assembled before him. "Are you Christians?" he asked them. They replied that they were. "Maximian and Galerius," he said, "the religious and august emperors, have done me the honour of writing to me to say that all Christians are to come and sacrifice, and that those who decline and disobey the order are to be punished with various pains and tortures." A panic seized the unhappy crowd. Husbands who might have been willing to endure something themselves could not bear the thought of what might be done to their wives. Priests, deacons, persons in lesser orders, gave way.

<sup>1</sup> *Analecta Boll.* ix. 123.

Even the young men and the virgins had no heart to stand out. All bowed down and worshipped the idols.

One unfortunate woman, who had committed the unchristian act, added to it an even baser sin of treachery. "We have all come to adore the gods," she cried, "but there are two girls here who have not obeyed the imperial order, and refuse to sacrifice." "Tell me their names," said the proconsul. The woman answered, "They are called Maxima and Donatilla."

The two girls were found, and brought before Anulinus. The dialogue which passed between them and their judge can hardly have been altogether as it is represented in the newly discovered Acts of these saints; but some of the questions and answers are well given. "What authority do you possess," he inquired, "that you should despise the religious and august emperors?" "The authority of the Christian faith," Maxima answered, "to which I belong." It came out on inquiry that Maxima was fourteen years of age. "You will reach the end of your years to-day," he answered, "if you do not sacrifice to the gods." "Sacrifice to them yourself," answered the fiery young African, "for you are like them." "The sentence is ready to fall," he said. "That is exactly what I wish and desire," she replied. "Then prepare your mind for it," he said. "It is better for me to receive sentence from you," the girl said, "than to despise the one true God." "Why are you so desperate?" said the proconsul; "will you sacrifice or not?" "I persevere in my God," she answered; "I will not worship the gods of others." "I shall bear with you," answered the patient Anulinus, "until you find your reason." "My

reason is with me," retorted the girl, "for the Lord also strengthens me against you, so that you will prove weak and I the stronger."

Perhaps the judge did not quite understand what Maxima meant by saying that the Lord was strengthening her. He asked her whom she had with her. She replied that she had her sister Donatilla. It is not certain whether she was only a sister in the faith, or whether she was a still younger girl of the same family. It was now Donatilla's turn to be questioned. Her answers were of the same character as those of Maxima; and indeed it must be acknowledged that if they were as related in the Acts the judge might have been excused if he had lost his temper with the girls. But he did not. He delayed judgment, and ordered them to be conducted to the town, only forbidding food or water to be given them.

They were on their way into Thuburbo, when a young friend of theirs, named Secunda, joined them. She was but twelve years old. Like Agnes and Eulalia, she had already received many proposals of marriage, but had set her heart upon remaining a virgin all her days. Secunda was in a balcony of the house of her wealthy parents when she saw Maxima and Donatilla being led along the road. She sprang down to them from the balcony, and entreated them not to go without her. They urged her to go back. "You are your father's only daughter," they said; "who is there for you to leave him to?" "God will requite you for it," answered the eager girl, "if you go without me." "I must tell you," Maxima said, "that our sentence is made out. What can you suffer? The flesh is weak." Secunda answered that she was not afraid of an earthly sentence; she desired to find her

spiritual Bridegroom, "who consoles and strengthens even the least." "Come, then, girl," said Donatilla: "the day of our passion is close at hand, and the angel of blessing comes to meet us." So they went on, and the sun set.

On the 28th of August, Anulinus had them up again, and asked if they would sacrifice. "We sacrifice our lives," they answered, "to Him to whom we have promised them." Once more Anulinus deferred sentence. On the 29th, at six in the morning, he delivered them over to be whipped. Maxima told him that it was no great punishment to have the flesh beaten, when the spirit is saved and the soul is redeemed and comforted. Then the poor girls, with their bruised backs, were put to lie on broken potsherds and glass. They told Anulinus that they had a great Physician who healed their wounds, and that while he, their judge, was being brought low, they were exalted in glory. They were placed on the hobby-horse. "It is the judgment of God," they said, "that men should suffer for their Lord." When it seemed as if they must be exhausted with their torture, and their throats parched, Anulinus ordered a cordial to be given them to revive them. "You are foolish," they said to him; "have we not our God, the Most High, for our refreshment?" The proconsul ordered hot coals to be strewn over their hair and their heads. "It is true," they said, "which is written in the law, 'We went through fire and water, and came through into a place of refreshment.'"

At last he ordered them to the amphitheatre. It was a joyful sound to them. "Now our hour is coming," they said; "give what sentence you will." The proconsul confessed that he was tired, and would



be glad to be rid of them. "Tired," cried the undaunted girls, "with one hour of it! You have only just come, and are you tired?" The proconsul gave word for a hungry bear to be let loose upon them. "Do as you are bidden," said Donatilla to the keeper; "do not fear." "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ we shall conquer you to-day," they cried to Anulinus. The bear, as so often happened, only growled and licked Maxima's feet. Then Anulinus read the final judgment off his tablet: "We order Maxima, Donatilla, and Secunda to be punished with the sword." They answered, "Thanks be to God," and suffered without further delay. Their bodies were buried within the precincts of the amphitheatre itself.<sup>1</sup>

Some four months after, the proconsul Anulinus took his seat at Theveste. "Crispina of Thagara, who has despised the law of our sovereign lords," was announced by the official of the court. She was, so St. Augustine says, a woman of wealth and position. Anulinus asked her if she was acquainted with "the sacred order." "I do not know," she answered, "what that order is." He told her that she must sacrifice to all the state gods on behalf of the emperors. "I have never sacrificed," Crispina replied, "nor do I sacrifice, except to the one God and to our Lord Jesus Christ His Son, who was born, and suffered." "Cut short your superstition," said the proconsul, "and bow your head to the sacred rites of the gods of Rome." "I pay reverence every day to my own God," was the answer; "beside Him I know no other." "You are stubborn and contumacious. You will not like it when you begin to feel the force of the laws." "I will gladly suffer whatever befalls me for the faith which I hold." "It is your foolishness

<sup>1</sup> *Analecta Boll.* ix. 110.



that you will not part with superstition and worship the sacred divinities." "I worship every day, but I worship the living and true God, who is my own Lord, beside whom I know no other." "I will show you the sacred commandment which you are to obey." "I will obey the commandment, but the commandment of my Lord Jesus Christ." "I shall direct your head to be cut off, if you do not comply with the orders of our lords the emperors. You will be obliged to submit and to obey them; all Africa has sacrificed, and you do not question it." "No good come to them for trying to make me sacrifice to devils instead of the one God who made heaven and earth, and all things that are in them." "Then do you not accept these gods? You will be compelled to pay homage to them, that you may live and prove yourself loyal." "It is no loyalty when people are oppressed and compelled against their will." "Nay, I wish that you would show your loyalty now by bending your head and offering incense in the sacred temples to the gods of Rome." "I have never done it since I was born, and know nothing about it; nor will I do it as long as I live." "Nay, do it, if you would not feel the severity of the laws." "I am not afraid of what you say. That is nothing. But if I should consent to be sacrilegious, the God who is in heaven will destroy me then and there, that I shall not be found in that day that is to come." "There will be no sacrilege in your obeying the sacred decrees." "Let the gods that have not made heaven and earth perish! I sacrifice to the eternal God, which endureth for ever and ever, who is the true God and to be feared; who made the sea, and the green herbs, and the dry land. What can men, who are His creatures, do to me?" "Follow the religion of Rome. Our lords, the

invincible Cæsars, observe it, and so do I." "I have told you again and again, that I am prepared to endure any tortures that you like to inflict upon me, rather than have my soul polluted with idols, which are but stones, and the work of men's hands." "You are uttering blasphemy. You are taking a line which is not for your good."

Anulinus ceased to argue. He spoke to the official whose business it was, and bade him disfigure her by shaving her head all over with a razor. It was what Lysias in Cilicia did to the martyr Theonilla. But the affront had no effect upon the brave woman. "Let the gods themselves speak," she cried, "and I will believe in them." When asked if she had no thought of her own salvation, she answered that if she did not care to be saved, she would never have stood at the proconsul's bar. "Do you wish for long life," said Anulinus, "or do you wish to expire in torments, like your fellows?" "If I wished to die," she retorted, "and to deliver my soul to destruction and eternal fire, I would give up my will to your devils." "I must have your head cut off," said Anulinus, "if you contemptuously refuse to worship the venerable gods." "I thank my God," she answered, "if I may attain that. I desire earnestly to lose my head for the sake of my God; for I do not sacrifice to vain idols, that are dumb and deaf." "And you really mean to persist in that foolish resolution," said the proconsul. Crispina answered, "My God, which is and which endureth for ever, ordained that I should be born. He gave me salvation by the saving water of baptism. He is with me, to help me, and to strengthen His handmaid not to commit sacrilege."

Then Anulinus the proconsul said, "Why should

we put up with the impious Crispina any longer? Read over the report of the examination from the minute-book." The report was read over. Then the proconsul delivered the judgment which he had written in his note-book: "Crispina, who persists in an unworthy superstition, has refused to sacrifice to our gods. In accordance with the heavenly commands of the imperial law, I order her to be punished with the sword." Crispina's answer was, "I bless God, who has thus vouchsafed to deliver me from your hands." It was the fifth of December. She made the sign of the cross upon her forehead, stretched out her neck to the sword, and died.<sup>1</sup>

A batch of twenty martyrs perished together at Hippo, of which the great Augustine was afterwards bishop. The bishop of the see, Fidentius, was himself one of them. Two others were women called Valeriana and Victoria. The names of the rest are no longer known on earth. Over some of them there was the scene, as touching as it was common, of unbelieving parents endeavouring to restrain their Christian children. "Do not mourn," said the young martyrs; "do not mourn for our joys. If you do not wish those whom you have nourished and brought up to go to hell, you should imitate us and not hinder us." The usual persuasions were resorted to by "the persecutor,"—probably the proconsul Anulinus. "Sacrifice to the gods," he said. "We will not do it," was the answer, "because we have an eternal God in heaven, to whom we always sacrifice. To devils we will not offer." "Why," urged the judge, "do you go against the sacred commandment?" "Because," they replied, "our heavenly Master says to us in the Gospel, 'Whosoever shall forsake father

<sup>1</sup> Franchi de' Cavalieri in *Studie Testi*, vol. ix. p. 32; Ruinart, p. 395.

and mother and wife and children, and all that he hath, for My name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit eternal life.' " "Then you will not obey the commands of the emperors?" said the magistrate. They answered "No." He asked them the same curious question which was put to Maxima at the beginning of her examination: "What authority can you have for it? You see that you are liable to punishment." The martyrs answered, "We bear the authority of the eternal King; therefore we pay no regard to the authority of mortal man."<sup>1</sup>

The most interesting documents relating to the persecution in North Africa belong to a somewhat earlier phase of the struggle, and are connected with the prohibition of Christian assemblies, and with the demand for the surrender of the Scriptures. Out of this last point arose one of the fiercest contentions that has ever been waged between one Christian faction and another. The fanatical party who are known to history as the Donatists maintained that on no account whatever was it lawful to hold communion with persons who had been guilty of surrendering, or even of seeming to surrender, any portion of the sacred writings. Others took a more moderate view. Mensurius, the Bishop of Carthage, thought himself justified in leaving a number of heretical books in his church and in the library attached to it. The officials asked no questions. They burned the heretical books and gave no further trouble. It was in vain that some persons, who were better informed, waited upon Anulinus and told him that the books which had been destroyed were not the books which were wanted. Anulinus sent them away to mind their own business.

<sup>1</sup> Augustine, *Sermon cccxxvi.*; Ruinart, p. 495.



A letter of Mensurius to Secundus of Tigisis, the chief bishop of Numidia, shows how entirely he shared the feelings of his great predecessor, Cyprian, with regard to those who went out of their way to defy the persecutors. He forbade the church to pay honour to men who offered themselves unsought to the government agents, and who volunteered the information that they possessed Scriptures and would never surrender them. He said that some of those who acted in this manner were persons of criminal lives ; some were in debt to the public funds, "who took occasion by the persecution to rid themselves of a life so burdened with debt ; or who thought that they could thus redeem their character, and cleanse themselves of their misdeeds ; or who even looked to get money, and to enjoy luxuries in prison, from the reverential kindness of Christians." This kindness of Christians for the confessors became a source of irritation to the official world, and therefore of danger to the Church. Caecilian, the head deacon of Carthage, undertook, under his bishop's sanction, to regulate the performance of these charitable acts, to the great displeasure of the fanatics. They affirmed that he posted at the prison gates men armed with whips and thongs of leather, to drive away people who brought food and drink for the martyrs. Within lay the famishing Christians, while outside, the food that was intended for them was scattered to the dogs, and the fathers and mothers of the sufferers filled the air with their lamentations.<sup>1</sup> Secundus wrote to remonstrate with Mensurius for his policy. He described the sufferings which the Numidian Christians chose rather to bear than to betray the Scriptures. He boasted that when the chief magistrate and senate of

<sup>1</sup> Dupin's *Optatus*, p. 156.



his own city sent a centurion and a constable to his house to ask for the word of God, to burn it, he answered them, "I am a Christian and a bishop, not a *traditor*"—that was the name given to those who delivered up the sacred things,—and that when they begged him to give them any useless and tattered scraps of writing, he had refused, after the example of Eleazar in the Book of Maccabees, who would not even pretend to eat the swine's flesh, lest his example should mislead others. Both men of his own party and Catholics also wondered how after such a bold answer Secundus escaped without hurt.<sup>1</sup>

We owe to the Donatist controversy the preservation of two official documents which show vividly the way in which the agents of the government went to work to find Bibles, and the way in which the Christians met them.

At Cirta, now Constantine, Felix, the *curator* or chief magistrate of the city, who was at the same time *flamen*, or priest of the emperor-worship, "came to the house where the Christians used to meet," and said to Paul, the bishop, "Bring out the Scriptures of the law, and anything else that you have here, in obedience to the command." The poor-spirited bishop answered, "The Scriptures are in the hands of the readers; but we will give you what we have here." "Show me the readers," said the curator, "or else send to them." "You know them all," was the answer. The curator denied it. "The public *officium* knows them," said the bishop, "that is to say Edusius and Junius, the shorthand writers." Felix said, "Let the matter of the readers stand over, as the *officium* will point them out. Produce what you have on the spot." The order was

<sup>1</sup> Augustine, *Brev. Collationis c. Donat.* d. III, c. xiii, n. 25.

obeyed. The bishop sat in his throne, with three presbyters beside him ; two deacons, four subdeacons, eight or more *fossores* or diggers, stood by ; a secretary made an inventory, while the contents of the treasury were brought out. There were two golden and six silver chalices, six silver cruets or pitchers, a silver pipkin, seven silver lamps, two taper-stands, seven short lamp-stands of brass, with their lamps, eleven other lamp-holders of brass with their chains, eighty-two women's tunics, thirty-eight veils, sixteen men's tunics, thirteen pairs of men's shoes and forty-seven pairs of women's, nineteen country smocks. When these had been counted out, the curator again told the diggers to produce what they had. They replied that they had produced everything. "Your answer is entered on the minutes," said Felix.

When they came to the library, the book-shelves, or cupboards, were empty ; but Silvanus, the *traditor*, who, strangely enough, became afterwards the Donatist bishop of the place, produced a silver coffer and a silver lamp, which he said that he had found behind a great jar. The secretary remarked to him, "You would have been a dead man if you had not found those." "Look carefully," said the curator, "to see that there is nothing else left." "There is nothing," said the traditor ; "we have fetched everything out."

They opened the *triclinium*, or hall for social gatherings, attached to the church. There they found four casks and six great jars. Then Felix repeated his demand for the Scriptures. A man called Catullinus thereupon produced one immense codex. "Why have you only given me one?" the curator asked him and his fellows ; "produce the Scriptures in your possession." They replied that they were subdeacons ; it was

not their place to keep the books ; that office belonged to the readers. Felix bade them show him the readers. They answered, "We do not know where they are." "If you do not know where they are," said Felix, "tell me their names." But the poor creatures were not so far gone as that. "We are not traitors," they replied ; "here we are ; put us to death." Felix ordered them to be apprehended.

A move was then made to the house of one of the readers, called Eugenius. Eugenius produced four books. Felix bade Silvanus and Carosus show him the rest of the readers ; but they referred him once more to his own officials, who had a list of them. The house of Felix, a worker in mosaic, was next visited. He produced five books. Victorinus produced eight ; Projectus produced five big and two little ones. Victor, a schoolmaster, offered two books and four *quiniones*—whatever that may mean. "You have more," said Felix ; "fetch them out." "If I had had more," answered the obsequious reader, "I would have given them to you." When they reached the house of Eutychius, Eutychius said that he had no books. The curator made no search, but only said, "Your statement is entered in the minutes." Coddeo's house was the last on the list. Coddeo did not appear, but his wife produced six books. "Look and see if you have no more," said Felix ; "fetch them out." The woman said that there were no more. The curator turned to a public servant and said, "Go in and see whether she has no more." He went in, and after searching said that he could find no more. Telling three of the men that he should hold them accountable if anything had been left undone, the magistrate went his way.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Gesta apud Zenophilum*, in Von Gebhardt's *Ausgewählte Märtyreracten*, p. 189, or in Dupin's *Optatus*.

The other document gives us some notion of the difficulties which hindered the execution of the edicts, especially in the smaller towns, where every one was intimately known to all his neighbours.

Felix, the bishop of a place called Autumni, who consecrated Caecilian of Carthage to be bishop after the death of Mensurius, was accused by the Donatists of being a *traditor*. He was away from home when the search for the books took place, and they said that he had left instructions with a man called Galatius to deliver up the books. The magistrates of Autumni at the moment were a certain Alfius Caecilianus and his colleague Augentius. Alfius was related to the bishop, whom he addresses as his *parens*, a word of wide meaning, like the French *parent*. Eleven years later, when Alfius was an old man, he was called upon to give an account, in a court of law, of what took place under his magistracy. This is what he said :—

“I had gone to Zama with Saturninus to get some linen under-garments, and when we came back the Christians themselves sent to me in my official residence, to ask, ‘Has the sacred decree yet reached you?’ I said, ‘No ; but I have already seen copies of it, and at Zama and at Furni I saw basilicas (or churches) destroyed and Scriptures burnt. So produce any Scriptures that you have, that the sacred order may be obeyed.’ Then they sent to the house of the bishop, Felix, to take away the Scriptures out of it, that they might be burnt in accordance with the sacred decree. So Galatius went with us to the place where they had been accustomed to have their prayers. We took out of it the bishop’s chair and some letters of greeting, and burnt them all outside the doors, according to the sacred decree. And when we sent to the



house of Felix, the bishop, the public officials brought back word that he was away."

It may illustrate the manners of the time, that the Donatists, somewhat later, persuaded Augentius, the colleague of Alfius, by means of his Donatist clerk, to endeavour to extract a more damaging admission from Alfius. "My colleague said to me, 'Felix, our bishop, has sent this man to ask you to make him out a paper. Some valuable books were lent to him, and he does not wish to return them. Will you kindly write to him that they were burnt in the year of your magistracy?' And I said, 'Is that the Christian faith?'"<sup>1</sup>

Another African bishop of the name of Felix showed a bolder front, and so did his subordinate clergy. His see was probably a town called Tibiuca, not far from Carthage, though the name is variously given. The edict was posted there on the 5th of June. The curator summoned "the elders of the people" to his quarters. It so happened that Felix had gone into Carthage that day. A priest called Aper, and two readers, Cyrus and Vitalis, were presented. The curator asked them if they had any sacred books. They said that they had. "Give them to be burnt with fire," said the magistrate. "Our bishop has them with him," was the reply. "Where is he?" asked the curator. Aper said that he did not know. They were accordingly put under surveillance till they could be sent to the proconsul Anulinus.

Next day the bishop came home. The curator sent an official to fetch him. "Bishop Felix," he said respectfully, "give me any books or parchments that you possess." "I have some," he answered firmly,

<sup>1</sup> *Acta Purgationis Felicis*, in Von Gebhardt's *Ausgewählte Märtyreracten*, p. 205, or in Dupin's *Optatus*.



"but I will not give them." "What the emperors have commanded," the curator said, "must come before what you say. Give me the books, to be burnt with fire." The bishop answered, "I would rather be burnt with fire myself than have the sacred Scriptures burnt. It is good to obey God rather than men." The curator could only repeat his saying, that the emperor's command must come before what the bishop chose to say. "The commandment of the Lord," answered Felix, "comes before the commandments of men." The magistrate gave him three days to reflect. On the third day he asked him the upshot of his reflexions. "What I said before," Felix answered, "I say again now, and I shall say the same before the proconsul." "You shall go to the proconsul, then," said the curator, "and shall there give your account."

The bishop was placed under the charge of a member of the local senate. On June 24 he was taken in chains to Carthage, and there thrown into prison. Next morning, very early, he was brought to the bar of the proconsul. Anulinus asked him why he had not given up his "useless books." Perhaps he intended to give the bishop a hint how to escape from the situation. But Felix was too straightforward to resort to any subterfuge. He replied to Anulinus, as he had done to the local magistrate at Tibiuca, "I have books ; but I will not give them." Anulinus put him into the lowest part of the prison for another sixteen days, and then had him out at ten o'clock at night to ask him the same question. The bishop's "pious obstinacy," as Gibbon calls it, only returned the same answer, "I do not intend to give them." There was only one end to such determination. "Slay Felix with the sword," said Anulinus. Felix cried aloud, "Thanks be to Thee,

O Lord, who hast vouchsafed to deliver me." At the place of execution, he lifted his eyes to heaven, and said, "Thanks be to Thee, O God. I have lived fifty-six years in this world. I have kept my virginity. I have preserved the Gospels. I have preached faith and truth. O Lord God of heaven and earth, O Jesus Christ, I bow my neck as an offering to Thee, who abidest for ever, to whom be glory and majesty, for ever and ever. Amen." <sup>1</sup>

If there is a note of straightforward obstinacy in the Acts of Felix, there is a ring of battle in those of the nine and forty martyrs of Abitina. Edited by a Donatist hand, they lose nothing of the warrior spirit which filled the martyrs themselves.

"When the trumpet of war was sounded," we are told, "the glorious martyrs in the city of Abitina set up the standard of the Lord in the house of Octavius Felix. There they were duly celebrating the *Dominicum*"—that is, the Lord's service, the Eucharist—"when they were seized by the magistrates of the city and by the commandant of the district in person." The leader of the party was unhappily not the Bishop of Abitina, for that prelate had betrayed his trust at the beginning of the persecution, and had forfeited the allegiance of his flock. The heavens, so it was said, had on that occasion fought for the Scriptures; for when the bishop gave them up to be burnt, a furious storm of rain and hail came down and put out the fire. The faithful were chiefly kept together by the earnestness of a layman called Dativus, who was a decurion, or member of the important senate of Carthage, and by the priest Saturninus and his family.

The forty-nine were first examined in the forum of

<sup>1</sup> Ruinart, p. 313; cp. *Analecta Boll.* xvi. p. 28.

Abitina by the curator, and joyfully confessed their faith ; but the curator was not competent to go further with them, and despatched them to Carthage, to the proconsul. Rejoicing to feel the chains upon their wrists, which were to them the earnest of better things to come, they sang all the way to the capital. There, on the 12th of February 304, they were presented to Anulinus, and the clerks of the court reported that they were charged with having held an assembly and celebrated the *Dominicum*, contrary to the imperial edict.

Anulinus began with Dativus. Dativus had answered the usual questions about his position and the like, and had confessed that he was a Christian and had taken part in the service, and was already stretched upon the hobby-horse to make him say who it was that had got up the gathering, when another of the party, called Thelica, stood out and cried, "We are Christians ; it was we who came together." Thelica succeeded in turning the severity of the law to himself. He was placed on the instrument, and the torture began. Out of the midst of his tortures Thelica kept crying, "Thanks be to God ! for Thy name's sake, O Christ the Son of God, deliver Thy servants." The purpose of Anulinus with him, as with Dativus, was to extract from him the name of the ringleader. At last, when the pain became intolerable, the man shouted, "It was the priest Saturninus," and then added, "and all of us." He would not admit that any one of the number, not even the priest, had been more zealous and brave than the rest. But he had given a name ; and when the proconsul asked which Saturninus was, Thelica pointed him out. Every utterance of the tortured man was entered in the official acts. "You are doing wrong,

unhappy men," he cried ; " you are fighting against God. O God most high, consent not to their sin. You are sinning, unhappy men ; you are striving against God." Then, perhaps addressing the Christians, he cried, " Keep the commandments of the most high God ; " then again, " You are doing wrong, unhappy men ; you are tearing in pieces the innocent. We are not murderers ; we have done no crime. O God, have mercy. I thank Thee, O Lord. Grant me to bear suffering for Thy name. Deliver Thy servants out of the captivity of this world. I thank Thee. I cannot thank Thee enough." When his sides were streaming with blood, he heard the voice of Anulinus saying to him, " You shall begin to feel what you have to undergo." " To glory !" shouted the martyr ; " I thank the God of kingdoms. The eternal kingdom appeareth ! the incorruptible kingdom ! O Lord Jesus Christ, we are Christians ; we serve Thee. Thou art our hope ; Thou art the Christian's hope. O God most holy, O God most high, O God almighty. We give Thee thanks for Thy name, O Lord God Almighty." Thelica's bodily strength was exhausted ; but when the proconsul said to him, " You would have done better to keep the commandments of the emperors and Caesars," he replied with unabated spirit, " I care for nothing but the law of God which I have learned. That is what I keep ; for that I will die ; in that I shall be perfected, and there is none beside it." At last Anulinus gave the word to stop, and Thelica was taken back to prison.

Dativus all this while was suspended on his hobby-horse. Attention returned to him after the removal of Thelica. Again and again he repeated that he was a Christian, and had joined in the gathering. Then the



brother of one of the female prisoners stepped forth with a grave accusation. He was a barrister; and, though he afterwards adopted his sister's religion, he was at that time a heathen. Dativus, he said, though not a friend of the family, had come to the house while the girl's father was away from Carthage, and while he himself was engaged in his studies, and had prevailed upon his sister Victoria and two other girls to run away with him to Abitina. But Victoria would not listen to her brother's insinuations. "With a Christian's freedom of speech," she burst forth and told the proconsul that no one had persuaded her to go to Abitina; that she had not gone there with Dativus; she could prove it by witnesses in the town. "I did all this of my own free will and choice," she said; "and I was at the gathering, and celebrated the *Dominicum* with the brethren, because I am a Christian." Dativus, amidst his tortures, answered the charge with the dignity of a senator. His one cry was, "O Lord Christ, let me not be confounded."

The proconsul bade the executioners to stop examining him on that point. Another accuser who attempted to take away his character was soon silenced. But after a while they began to ply Dativus again with the question, who had brought about the gathering for divine service. He answered that there was more than one person. When the torture began again, he repeated his former prayer, that he might not be confounded, and then he said, "What have I done? Saturninus is our priest." It was the second time that the priest had been mentioned, and the proconsul now turned to Saturninus, and said, "You acted against the command of the emperors and Caesars in bringing all these people together." The priest replied, "We had no hesitation



about celebrating the *Dominicum*." "Why so?" asked Anulinus. "Because the *Dominicum* cannot possibly be dropped," was the reply. Directly it was uttered, Saturninus was hoisted to the horse which Thelica had left, opposite to that of Dativus. The torturers were still at work upon Dativus; but he seemed to be "rather a spectator of his own tortures than a sufferer." At intervals he ejaculated, "Help me, O Christ, I beseech Thee. Have pity. Save my soul. Keep my spirit, that I may not be confounded. I beseech Thee, O Christ, grant me the power to endure." The proconsul observed to him, "Belonging to this famous city, you ought rather to have drawn other people to a good mind instead of transgressing the commandment of the emperors and Caesars." But Dativus only exclaimed more loudly than before, "I am a Christian;" and at length Anulinus cried "Hold," and Dativus was taken to the prison.

The horse upon which Saturninus was slung was still wet with the blood of Thelica. The proconsul asked him whether it was he who had gathered his fellow Christians together. "Yes," he said at first; and then modestly disclaimed the special honour, by adding, "I was present at the service." A reader named Emeritus sprang forward and took up the challenge. "I am responsible," he cried; "the services have been held at my house." But Anulinus refused to follow up the confession at once. He went on with the priest. "Why did you transgress the commandment, Saturninus?" he said. Saturninus replied as before, "The *Dominicum* cannot be dropped. So the law orders." Anulinus expostulated; "Still, you ought not to have disregarded the prohibition; you ought to observe it, and not engage in things that are contrary to the

emperors' command." The words were gentle enough, but they were the prelude to a fearful mangling of the elderly man's body. Saturninus cried out, "I beseech Thee, O Christ, hear me ; I thank Thee, O God ;" then, whether in prayer to God or in defiance to man, "Cause me to be beheaded ;" and again, "I beseech Thee, O Christ, have mercy. O Son of God, succour me." Once more the proconsul asked him, "Why did you transgress the commandment ?" The priest's only answer was, "So the law orders. So the law teaches." "Hold," said Anulinus, and sent him to prison, under the sentence which he had desired.

Anulinus was now able to attend to Emeritus. When he was fastened up, Anulinus said to him, "Were the meetings held in your house, in contravention of the emperors' commands ?" "Yes," he answered, "we have had the *Dominicum* in my house." "Why did you let them come in ?" asked the proconsul. "Because they are my brothers," was the reply, "and I could not forbid them." "But you ought to have forbidden them," Anulinus said. "It was impossible," answered Emeritus ; "for we cannot do without the *Dominicum*." Then the torture began. A fresh executioner took the place of the former, who was tired, and dealt vigorous strokes. Emeritus cried, "I beseech Thee, O Christ, help me. You are transgressing the commandment of God, you unhappy people." "You ought not to have received them," persisted Anulinus. "I could not help receiving my brothers," again replied the martyr. "The order of the emperors and Caesars comes first," Anulinus said. "God," replied Emeritus, "is greater than the emperors. I beseech Thee, O Christ : I offer Thee praise, O Christ. O Lord, grant me endurance." The proconsul suddenly asked him, "Have you any Scrip-

tures in your house?" "I have some," Emeritus replied, "but I have them in my heart." "Have you any in your house, or not?" said Anulinus. "I have them in my heart," the reader replied; "Christ, I beseech Thee. Praise to Thee. Deliver me, O Christ. I suffer in Thy name. It is a short suffering, a willing suffering, O Christ. Lord, let me not be confounded." "Hold," said Anulinus to the executioner; then making a note of the confession of Emeritus in his note-book, along with the rest, he said, "You shall all pay the penalty you have deserved, according to your own admission."

The proconsul was heartily tired of his business, though he had not half finished it. The reader Felix, son of the priest Saturninus, was next put forward. Anulinus, addressing all the prisoners together, said, "I trust that you will take the line of obedience to the commandment, that you may live." A shout went up from the whole band, "We are Christians. We cannot but keep the holy law of the Lord, even to the shedding of our blood." To the question whether he had attended the service, or whether he had any Scriptures, Felix only answered that he was a Christian. "I did not ask whether you are a Christian," said Anulinus, "but whether you took part in the gathering, and whether you have any Scriptures." "O foolish question," cries the ancient editor of the Acts; "as if a man could be a Christian without the *Dominicum*! As there can be no *Dominicum* without Christians, so there can be no Christian without the *Dominicum*." The reply of Felix embraced both parts of the proconsul's question. "We had a glorious gathering; we have always come together for the *Dominicum*, to read the Scriptures of the Lord." The brave reader was so

severely thrashed with sticks that he died of it ; and so did another of the number who bore the same common name.

Another reader, Ampelius, answered in the words of Emeritus ; "I took part in the service with the brethren, and celebrated the *Dominicum* ; and I have the Scriptures of the Lord with me, but written in my heart. Christ, I offer Thee praise. Hear me, O Christ." With nothing worse than a few blows about the neck, he went back to prison "as if to the tabernacle of the Lord." Rogatian confessed his faith, and was sent to prison unhurt ; Quintus and Maximian, after being belaboured with sticks. A third and more youthful Felix was beaten in like manner, crying loudly that the *Dominicum* is the hope and salvation of Christians. To the proconsul's question he answered, "Yes, I celebrated the *Dominicum* devoutly ; I took part in the service with the brethren, for I am a Christian."

"And were you also present, Saturninus ?" said the proconsul to the next man, who was a son of the priest, and, like his brother Felix, a reader. "I am a Christian," was his answer. "I do not ask you that," said Anulinus, "but whether you did the *Dominicum*." "I did," said Saturninus, "because Christ is our Saviour." Thereupon the young man was fastened upon the same hobby-horse from which his father had been taken down. When he was stretched ready for the torture, Anulinus said to him, "What do you propose, Saturninus ? You see where you are ? Have you any Scriptures ?" He answered, "I am a Christian." "I ask you," said Anulinus, "whether you were at the meeting, and whether you have the Scriptures." "I am a Christian," he replied ; "there is no name besides Christ's that we ought to keep holy."



"Since you persist in your obstinacy," said the proconsul, "you must be tortured. Tell me whether you have any Scriptures." Then turning to the officers, he said, "Torture him." The claw, from which his father's blood had not been wiped, tore open the young man's sides, and at last he cried out, like others before him, that he had the Scriptures of the Lord, but in a place from which no violence could tear them,—in his heart. "I beseech Thee, O Christ, grant me power to endure," he prayed; "my hope is in Thee." "Why did you transgress the commandment?" asked Anulinus. "Because I am a Christian," the young man answered. He was soon sent to rejoin his father in prison.

It was growing late in the day, and Anulinus was anxious to get on. Addressing the large band of Christians who were still to be dealt with, he said, "You have seen what those who persisted have borne, and what those who still persist will have to bear. Therefore let any one of you who wishes to obtain pardon, and to be saved, speak out." "We are Christians," was the unanimous answer; and they were all sent back to prison under sentence of death.

To two of them, however, was granted the honour of being separately questioned. One was the maiden Victoria, who had consecrated her virginity to Christ. The proconsul asked what her intentions were. She answered firmly, "I am a Christian." Her brother Fortunatian, who acted as her advocate, affirmed that she had been driven out of her mind with subtle arguments, but Victoria answered, "This is my mind; I have never changed it." The proconsul was anxious to spare her. "Will you go with your brother Fortunatian?" he inquired. "No," the maiden answered; "I am a Christian, and my brethren are those who



keep the commandments of God." Anulinus endeavoured to persuade her. "Think what is for your good," he said; "you see your brother is desirous to provide for your safety." "I have told you my mind," Victoria said; "I have never changed it, and I was at the service and celebrated the *Dominicum* with the brethren, for I am a Christian."

The last of the nine and forty was a little boy called Hilarian. He was the youngest child of the brave priest Saturninus. He had seen his father and one brother tortured, another brother beaten almost to death, and a maiden sister, whose name was Mary, sent to prison to await martyrdom. The humane Anulinus thought to relieve the boy of responsibility for his action. "Did you follow your father or your brothers?" he asked. But the boy saw through the artifice, and would neither incriminate them nor lose his own glory. He answered, "I am a Christian. It was of my own freewill and choice that I took part in the service with my father and with the brethren." Anulinus attempted to frighten him with ugly threats of injury without martyrdom. "I shall cut off your hair," he said, "and your nose, and your ears, and then let you go." Hilarian answered boldly, "Do whatever you please, for I am a Christian." The proconsul contended no further, but ordered him to prison along with the rest, under condemnation of death. The court rang with the boy's answer, "Thanks be to God."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ruinart, p. 338.



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